

Rock Your Plot: A Simple System for Plotting Your Novel Workbook

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Published in the United States.
First Publishing Date July 21, 2012

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INTRODUCTION

What this book covers:

This workbook will walk you through assignments that will get you from vague story idea to completed rough draft, covering the following steps:

- Testing your premise for inherent conflict and sustainability
- Goal, motivation, conflict
- Character sketches.
- Plot Points
- Scene Outline

For each step, follow the assignments to help you put the principles into practice in your own novel.

CHAPTER 1: TEST YOUR IDEA

The premise is a fundamental concept that drives the plot. It helps identify the protagonist, and should state your story goal.

1. What is your premise?

One sentence, if possible.

2. Check your sentences for the principles of high concept, using the following field test questions:

Is there something noticeably different from what's usually in the genre? ()

Is there an element of universal appeal? ()

Is there an emotional appeal? ()

Is there visual appeal? ()

Can it be easily reduced to one sentence? ()

3. Do you have at least one main character who wants something? ()

4. Is something significant standing in the way of his achieving the goal? ()

5. What is your target market?

Manuscript Project Target: _____ words

6. Why do you want to write this book? What appeals to you about it?

7. Do you have a message or a theme you want to explore with this book? ()

CHAPTER 2: GOAL – MOTIVATION- CONFLICT

The key to all plotting is in what is commonly referred to as the GMC – the Goal, Motivation, and Conflict for your characters. Essentially, you want to work on the assumption that your character has two driving desires: an internal goal, and an external goal.

External Goal

The external goal is going to be your story question, in terms of the protagonist.

Internal Goal

The internal goal deals with feelings and emotions, and by its very nature is not quantifiable.

Motivation

The goal has to be important to the protagonist in ways that the reader will understand. Motivation is the key for setting that up.

Conflict

Once you've set that hook, you're going to do everything in your power to prevent your character to get there.

So how do you do that? Here are some pointers:

- 1. The conflict should be related to the goal.***
- 2. The conflict must escalate.***
- 3. Think of the worst possible thing that could happen to your character, again in terms of the story goal.***

ASSIGNMENT:

I External Goals

1. Write the external goal for your main protagonist.

2. Write the motivation for the external goal.

3. Write the conflict for the external goal.

II Internal Goals

Repeat for the internal goal, motivation and conflict.

1. Write the internal goal for your main protagonist.

2. Write the motivation for the internal goal.

3. Write the conflict for the internal goal.

Repeat all steps for any major character, especially an antagonist if applicable.
 Print the charts below to use for an overview for your characters.

QUICK CHART for GOAL-MOTIVATION-CONFLICT

NAME:	External	Internal
GOAL		
MOTIVATION		
CONFLICT		

QUICK CHART for GOAL-MOTIVATION-CONFLICT

NAME:	External	Internal
GOAL		
MOTIVATION		
CONFLICT		

CHAPTER 3: CHARACTER SKETCHES

Creating Compelling Main Characters

My character method:

1. *Start with a sketch.*
2. *Write an exploratory biography.*
3. *Are you having trouble getting a grip on the character? Then interview the character to hear his or her “voice.”*

How many sketches, and which characters?

Do the character work for any major characters.

ASSIGNMENT:

1. Describe your character.

2. Using the character’s age as a starting point, write a life history of your character, keeping the GMC and your premise in mind.

3. If you like, write either a page or two in the first person POV of your character, or “interview” your character, to get a sense of his/her beliefs and how he/she is “entering” the story.

CHAPTER 4: OVERVIEW OF THE PLOT POINTS

The Plot Points

After the GMC charts and background character sketches, the next step is figuring out the plot points. They are the guideposts to get you from beginning to the end of your novel.

These are the plot points. *Space provided is for brief notes:*

1.The Inciting Incident: the moment something changes.

2.Plot Point 1: establishing the story question.

3.Pinch Point 1: Opposition shows itself.

4.Midpoint/Plot Point 2: new information shifts protagonist from reactive to proactive.

5.Pinch Point 2: the antagonist strikes back.

6.Plot Point 3: ramp up for third act.

7.Black Moment: worst thing ever (in terms of story question.)

8.Resolution.

CHAPTER 5: THE OPENING, A.K.A. "THE INCITING INCIDENT"

Your inciting incident should have a hook, something intriguing, a puzzle or an outrageous character or, my personal favorite, something that makes the reader want to find out what's going on.

ASSIGNMENT:

Write down your inciting incident.

What's the "something different" that is going to start to push your protagonist towards an inevitable change?

CHAPTER 6: PLOT POINT 1

This is the end of the first act, and the gateway to the vast wilderness that is The Middle. At this plot point, you firmly establish the story question, as well as giving the motivation why your protagonist wants her goal and what the (dire) consequence is if she tries to avoid it.

Plot Point 1 is the point of no return.

What the first plot point shows.

The Plot Point 1 is where your character knows what he or she needs to do, and has absolutely no frickin' clue how to go about that. Usually, a sense of panic and headless-chicken-running-around ensues...in my stories, at least!

ASSIGNMENT:

Write down your first plot point... *basically, your GMC, in one scene that illustrates why it's important and how serious the conflict is.*

CHAPTER 7: THE MIDPOINT, A.K.A. PLOT POINT 2

Plot Point 2, also known as “the Midpoint,” is when your protagonist figures out what she needs to do.

This proactive quality is usually the best way to define a midpoint, in my opinion.

The midpoint is also an escalation.

New information is introduced.

Choices are made.

The protagonist's options are pruned. When he gets to the inevitable climax, you want the reader to feel that, given the character he is and the choices he’s made, he has no other reasonable option.

The Black Moment needs to have a ring of inevitability—like a train wreck you can’t look away from. To do that, he’s got to burn some bridges.

ASSIGNMENT:

Write a brief description of your midpoint.

Use your GMC charts, and write what your character has learned and what his action towards achieving the goal is going to be. Also, check to see if the conflict is greater now than it was in plot point 1. What has escalated?

CHAPTER 8: PLOT POINT 3

The third plot point is the calm before the storm of the third act: like the “click-click-click” of a roller coaster, just before the plunge.

Similar to the midpoint, this usually also has a new information aspect to it. In fact, this should be the last big reveal, and the thing that sets up your last act. What the reader and protagonist learn at this plot point should set the protagonist up for the big dramatic conclusion.

No new information after this point.

Figure out this point last.

I *always* write the third plot point *after* I write the Black Moment and Resolution points. Why? Because then I’ll know what information needs to be set up by this point, and I’ll know what would be the most devastating lead in to the Black Moment will be.

ASSIGNMENT:

Write down a brief description of your third plot point. *I’d suggest saving this for after the Black Moment and resolution.*

CHAPTER 9: BLACK MOMENT

The Black Moment, which some writers call the climax, should be one of the easiest plot points to nail down. (The only one that might be easier would be Plot Point 1, because if you don't know that, you don't know your story question.)

If you know the first plot point, then your question to arrive at the Black Moment is:
What is the absolute worst thing that can happen in terms of his goal?

External or Internal?

Now, note that this can be your internal or external story goal.

Develop internal conflict by forcing the protagonist make a tough choice, one at the expense of the other: in order to achieve the external goal.

Go for the soul-crush.

ASSIGNMENT:

Write down a soul-crushing Black Moment. Make sure that it ties in to the character's GMC, either internal, external, or both.

Chapter 10: RESOLUTION

The tricky part about really disastrous Black Moments? Figuring a way out of them.

How to resolve a soul-crushing Black Moment.

First, brainstorm.

Keep an open mind. You might not get the answer you're looking for, but your brain will probably click into an answer trying to defend whatever it is your subconscious wants.

Second, have faith. Take a little breather, give yourself some space, and believe that you're going to find the solution.

ASSIGNMENT:

Write down how the story resolves. What is your ending? Does it tie up all loose ends necessary in this novel?

CHAPTER 11: PINCH POINTS

ASSIGNMENT:

Write down Pinch Point 1 and Pinch Point two for your novel.

Pinch Point #1:

Pinch Point #2:

PART II: CREATING THE OUTLINE

By now, you should have:

- 1. Your character background (for at least the protagonists)
- 2. Your character GMC charts (again, for at least the protagonists)
- 3. Your plot points:
 - Inciting Incident
 - Plot Point 1
 - Pinch Point 1
 - Midpoint
 - Pinch Point 2
 - Plot Point 3
 - Black Moment
 - Resolution

ASSIGNMENT:

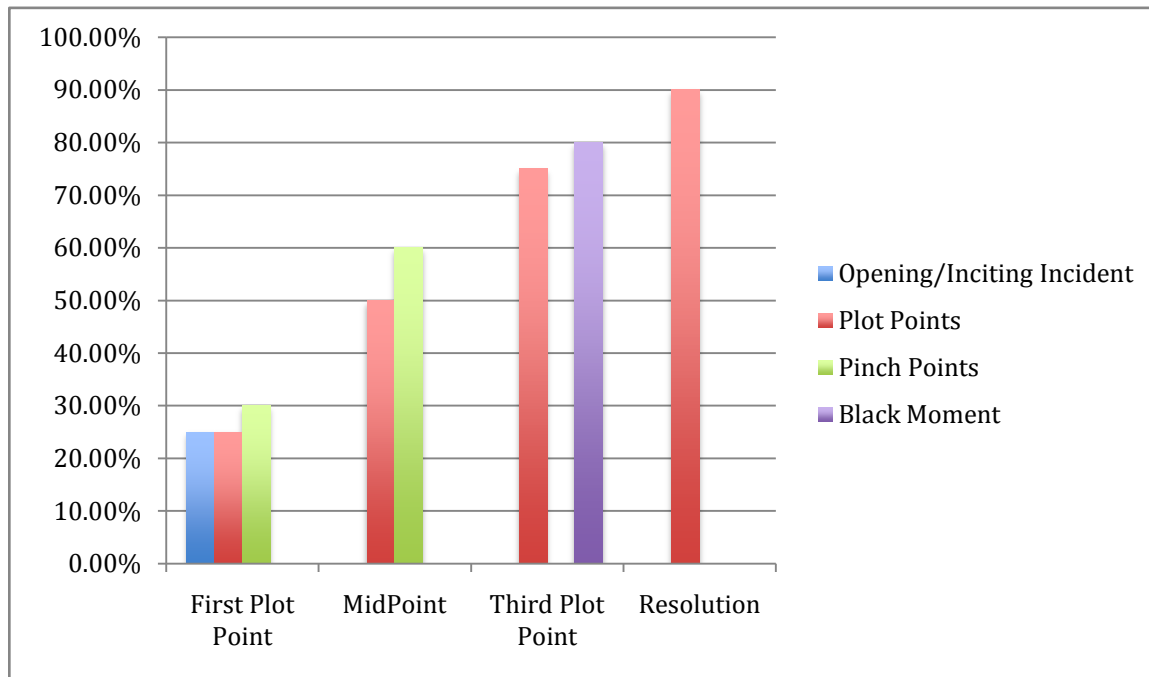
Write a scene outline of every scene you think will be in the book.

Each scene supports the story as a whole. And if things go wrong, you will have a diagram that shows you why.

The System:

1. First, pick a word count/page count that fits your target genre.
2. Then, pick an arbitrary number of scenes.
3. Then, create the empty outline. [Blank Scene Outline](#).
4. Pop in the plot points.

Suggested Novel Breakdown according to Plot Points:



Once you've popped in the plot points, you're not going to try plotting a book from beginning to end – giving you a framework, as well as a clear beginning and end.

What each scene note in the outline should contain.

You should have the goal-motive-conflict-disaster (or "GMCD") pattern in every scene, and the sequel either at the beginning or at the end of an existing GMCD scene.

In my scene outlines, I include the following information:

() **1. POV.** I want to know who the main POV character is, because that's whose scene goal I'm looking at.

() **2. Goal.** What does the POV character want?

() **3. Motivation.** Why does the POV character want it so badly? More importantly: how does it relate to the overall story goal, the big GMC?

() **4. Conflict.** What's standing in the way?

() **5. Disaster.** This is the *no, yes-but, or no-and-furthermore*. Unless it's a resolution scene, every scene is going to end in a disaster.

On my website, I will include a full scene outline for one of my old novels, with this level of detail, just so you can get a sense of how it looks and what's involved. [Sample Scene Outline – Players Club.](#)

Once your outline is filled in...

You're done! You have a full road map, you know where your story goes (in theory) and you're ready to rock a quick-and-dirty lightning draft.

Adjusting the outline.

Once you're *in* the draft, you may notice that things change: something that made sense in capsule form suddenly doesn't work when you write it out.

You may realize that you've made an error in motivation, or something doesn't flow, or you really, really want to add a scene/change a scene/ lose a scene.

Look at the outline overall: one change will affect the entire novel. That said, it's usually a matter of tweaking, here and there. Little notes to remind yourself, or a few new sticky notes, and you'll be good to go.

And that's it.