

Handout

## Assemble Your Story into an Outline

GPCWC August 10, 2024  
S 2:00-2:50

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While every story is unique, stories unfold in a general pattern that moves from ordinary world, to inciting, to midpoint, then climax and resolution. This session will help you consolidate your elements into a sturdy outline that you can use to create your first draft — or rescue a stuck manuscript — and have you typing "The End" before you know it.

### OUTLINE

Introduction  
Story Kernel  
Preliminary Scene List  
Story Models  
7 Point Story Method  
List of Scenes

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## INTRODUCTION

This lecture will probably be the hardest because you are synthesizing the material you've been working on.

You will not finish your story outline and scene list by the end of this lecture. It may take you a week or even more. That's OK. Keep working on this as long as you need to. Once you get a solid outline, the writing will go much easier.

Ready? Let's get started.

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## STORY KERNEL

A story must have these components:

- A main character (Hero)  
Note: If you are writing a romance you will need two main characters.
- Hero's Goal — what is he working for throughout the story.
- Stakes — why reaching this goal is so important.
- Obstacles — what is blocking the Hero from reaching his goal. Include a primary Villain who spearheads the opposition.

Bonus Components:

- Secret — what secret is one of your characters hiding?
- Character Arc — how will your Hero become a better person because of the events in your story?



### STORY KERNEL EXERCISES

- 😊 1. Name your Hero. Give a thumbnail of his or her story world.

EXAMPLE: Lucy Pevensie is a young girl who has moved to the country with her brothers and sister to avoid London bombing during World War 2. While exploring one day she opens a wardrobe and finds a magical world called Narnia.

- 😊 2. Determine your Hero's main story goal.

EXAMPLE: In Narnia Lucy meets a faun named Tumnus. When she returns with her siblings she learns Tumnus has been kidnapped by the White Witch. She must rescue Tumnus. She and her siblings soon learn that they in fact must vanquish the Witch and return Narnia to its peaceful state.

- 😊 3. Create high stakes.

EXAMPLE: If Lucy fails then Narnia will be destroyed.

- 😊 4. Write down your villain.

EXAMPLE: the White Witch will fight tooth and nail to prevent Lucy and her siblings from succeeding.

😊 5. Describe a secret one of your characters has.

EXAMPLE: Edmund, Lucy's brother, has met the White Witch and is allied with her.

😊 6. Describe your Hero's character arc. Describe others if appropriate.

EXAMPLE: Lucy starts by being timid. She changes to become confident and able to rule as Queen of Narnia.

Edmund starts by being resentful and treacherous. He changes by becoming brave and loyal and able to rule as King of Narnia.

## PRELIMINARY SCENE LIST

Your Story Kernel should automatically generate ideas for possible scenes in your story.

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### PRELIMINARY SCENE LIST EXERCISE

😊 1. List some scenes you can imagine might happen in your story.

EXAMPLE:

- Lucy meets Tumnus.
- Lucy has to get her siblings into Narnia.
- Lucy revisits Tumnus to find he is missing.
- Edmund secretly meets with the White Witch.
- Lucy and her siblings learn about the prophecy that predicts they will vanquish the White Witch.
- Lucy and her siblings learn about Aslan, the Royal Lion who will come to reclaim Narnia.
- Edmund rats out his siblings so that the White Witch finds out they are in Narnia.
- The White Witch does some bad things.
- Lucy and her siblings fight the White Witch.
- Aslan vanquishes the White Witch.
- Lucy and her siblings become Kings and Queens.

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## STORY MODELS

I believe STORY is an abstract concept that is wired into our brains. There are many models of STORY people have created including Hero's Journey, Snowflake, and Save the Cat. (B.K. Bass lists a few of these models at <https://www.campfirewriting.com/learn/narrative-structure>).

All of these models are useful but only work to a certain point. They approach but do not capture the abstract essence of STORY.

These models should be thought of as helpful guidelines, but they SHOULD NOT DICTATE what you write. Writing a story is an art, not a paint-by-numbers endeavor. If you are having trouble filling a box on a model, then perhaps this particular model isn't working for you. That's OK. There are lots of alternatives.

At the same time, remember that so many models can become confusing if you try to go back and forth between all of them. For this reason, I recommend you choose one model at a time that makes sense to you and stick with it until it isn't helpful anymore. After that you can move onto another if you wish, or just continue to hammer out your story points by yourself if that seems better.

For this series I'm presenting, I will recommend a few models that I think may be helpful as you walk through the preliminary story development phase. If these models don't work for you then no worries, just find something else.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, recognize that organizing your story is the most difficult part of creating a novel or screenplay. This is really hard. Be kind to yourself. Keep at it. Especially if you are new to this process you'll find you need much trial and error and many hours to work out something that works. You will probably need to take breaks for a few days, weeks, or even months, and that's OK. If you want you can write a bit, then go back to structure a bit. Just be patient with yourself and stick with it. You're learning a lot even if it doesn't feel like that.

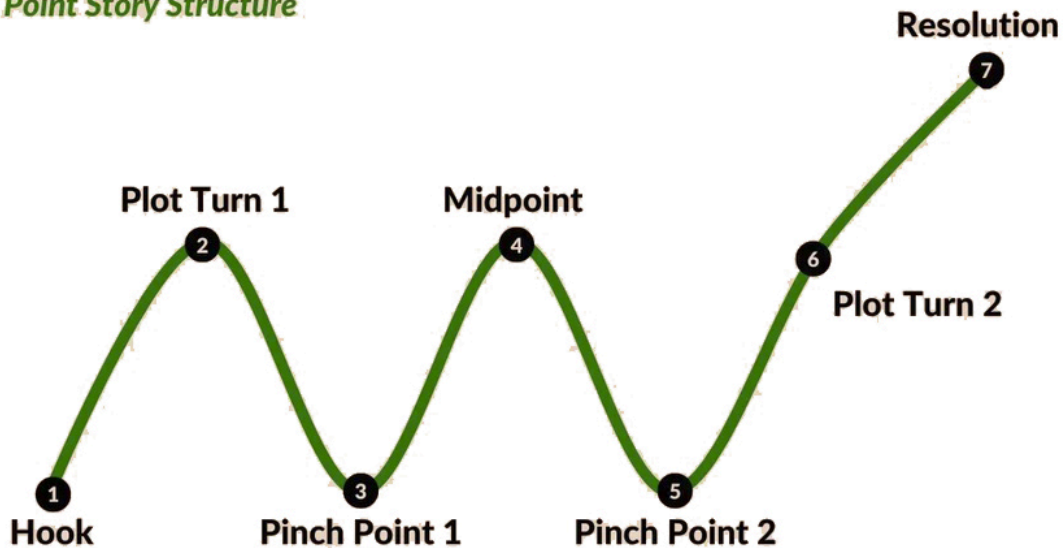
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## 7-POINT STORY METHOD

I love the 7-point method for outlining a brand new story because it's simple and gives you a solid start. This method can be used for novels, screenplays, and short stories. It was originally described by novelist Dan Wells in 2013.

(<https://gwuwi.com/2016/05/04/writing-method-7-point-system-by-dan-wells-printable-summaries/>).

### 7 Point Story Structure



Here are the 7 points of the STORY as described by Wells. I'm using example points from the film *Rocky* as described by Jason Hamilton. (<https://kindlepreneur.com/7-point-story/>). I also list the plot points if you're writing a romance.

#### Hook

The hook serves as an introduction to the story, establishing the status quo and introducing the audience to the characters and the world. We should meet the protagonist here and learn more about them and how they interact with the setting.

EXAMPLE: Rocky Balboa is a struggling boxer past his prime and having financial troubles. He has the potential to be a champion but doesn't believe he has the skills to compete against quality fighters. Part of him feels like all he needs is a chance to show he can be successful and someone to support him because he's never had anyone care about him.

Romance Hook: Establish the status quo of the characters.

### Plot Turn 1

The first plot turn breaks away from the status quo in what is more commonly known as the *inciting incident*. This is usually an outside force calling the protagonist to action, pushing them away from their status quo.

EXAMPLE: Apollo Creed, the current heavyweight champion, had a championship bout scheduled, but the contender was injured and had to cancel. Apollo comes up with an idea to find a fighter last minute but still gets the fans excited to see the fight. He gives Rocky a chance even though he's a nobody in the sport as a publicity stunt and because he thinks the match will be easy. At this point, the main plot starts to unfold.

Romance Plot Turn 1: The love interests meet or their relationship changes to a budding romance.

### Pinch 1

The first pinch raises the stakes. This can include introducing villains, placing your characters in more dangerous situations, or putting obstacles in their way. No matter what direction the plot takes here, it should establish major challenges or dangers for the characters.

EXAMPLE: After Rocky gets the news that he will get a shot at the championship title, he starts to feel the pressure. Between his lack of confidence and the environment he was raised in holding him back, the chances of a victory seem low.

Romance Pinch 1: The love interests enter a conflict that stands in the way of romance.

### Midpoint

At the midpoint, the protagonist makes a conscious decision to take charge of the situation. Up to this point in the story, they've been reacting to the outside world. From here on, the protagonist will be the driving force of the plot.

EXAMPLE: Rocky decides to take action and go from reactive to proactive. He asks Mickey, the local gym owner, to be his trainer and begins to wake up early every morning to train with him. He stops all the bad habits that were getting in the way of his success.

Romance Midpoint: One or both of the love interests decide to resolve the conflict and pursue the romance.

## Pinch 2

Things go from bad to worse in the second pinch. No matter what the protagonist has endured or achieved so far, things should seem at their most hopeless here. Depending on the type of story, this can be a death, the team splitting up, or the villain obtaining the McGuffin that will end the world.

EXAMPLE: Rocky's antagonistic forces come back to haunt him once again before his big fight. The evening before the boxing match, he begins to lose his confidence again and questions if he deserves the opportunity when others are more deserving. Instead of setting a goal to win the bout, he decides the best he can do is go the distance and not get knocked out.

Romance Pinch 2: Something goes wrong that will doom the relationship. It looks like there is no hope.

## Plot Turn 2

The second plot turn is the final skin-of-their-teeth moment where the protagonist finds what they need to overcome the big bad. This could be anything, but it is usually an object or a lesson. It could be the magical sword, the magic within, or the realization that the true magic was the friends they made along the way.

EXAMPLE: Right when the viewers begin to think Rocky doesn't have a chance, he knocks Apollo Creed down for the first time in his career, and the plot takes a turn for the better. But it's only the first round, and Rocky has another 14 to go to prove he can stand toe to toe with a world champion.

Romance Plot Turn 2: One of the love interests discovers the key to winning the other's heart.

## Resolution

The resolution wraps it all up. The conflict gets resolved, the big bad might get their due, and the hero settles into a new status quo. In classical plotting parlance, this includes both the climax and the denouement, and I usually spread these between two chapters.

EXAMPLE: Towards the end of the final fight, you can see the work he put in during the midpoint starting to pay off. The resolution shows Rocky achieving his goal of making it through the entire fight without giving up. Some readers might even consider that he won, but the match is a draw for the time being. In the story, the resolution leaves you wanting more in a sequel.

Romance Resolution: The conflict is resolved, and the love interests live happily ever after.



## 7 POINT SYSTEM EXERCISES

To use this 7 Point System in your writing, it's easiest to take the points out of order so you can maximize contrast and impact. For each of these exercises, imagine a scene that will describe the point. Summarize your scene in a few lines. Ready?

### 😊 1. Write your Resolution.

Everything in your story leads to this moment. Describe what your Hero has learned and what his life is like now that everything is finished.

EXAMPLE: Lucy, Edmund, and their siblings are now reigning Kings and Queens of Narnia, and are hunting the magical White Stag. They accidentally blunder back into their original world through the wardrobe.

### 😊 2. Write your Beginning.

You want the beginning to clearly contrast to the ending. How are your Hero's circumstances and personal strength substantially different from the end? What sets the story into motion?

EXAMPLE: as the youngest of four children, Lucy feels small and unimportant. She explores a wardrobe and discovers a new world, Narnia. She meets a faun, Tumnus, who tells her about the White Witch.

### 😊 3. Write your Midpoint.

This is the place where things get serious for your Hero. He recognizes in pursuing the Story Goal that his old ways aren't working and he must go in a new direction. The midpoint can be a false high but is *usually a disaster*.

EXAMPLE: The children have eaten dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver when they suddenly realize Edmund has disappeared — he has gone to find the White Witch.

### 😊 4. Write your Plot Turn 1.

In Plot Turn 1 your Hero engages with your story and enters a new situation with new people and new problems. This is the point at which Act 1 becomes Act 2/1.

EXAMPLE: All of the children enter the wardrobe and find Narnia. Now they believe Lucy. They all go to visit Tumnus.



😊 5. Write your Plot Turn 2.

Your Hero recognizes that last piece of knowledge that he needs to go ahead to make a plan and conquer the story goal.

EXAMPLE: Aslan, the Royal Lion, is alive again! He declares the White Witch's power is broken and he will lead the good Narnians to reclaim the kingdom.

😊 6. Write your Pinch 1.

This occurs right after your Hero has entered the new world of Act 2/1. Something goes wrong and traces of the Villain appear. The Hero is forced to react and pursue the story goal.

EXAMPLE: The children learn that Tumnus has been arrested, and that they are also at risk from the White Witch. They must figure out how to rescue Tumnus.

😊 7. Write your Pinch 2.

This is the darkest moment of your story in which there is no hope. The Villain is closing in and will win. Everything is lost.

EXAMPLE: Lucy was encouraged when Aslan negotiated for Edmund's return, but shocked and grief-stricken when he willingly sacrificed himself a few hours later. Aslan is dead. Nothing else matters.

## LIST OF SCENES

Although this number is variable, a good rule of thumb is that a story (novel or screenplay) has 40-60 scenes, divided evenly into four story quarters (Act 1, Act 2/1, Act 2/2, and Act 3).

Now that you have a preliminary shape for your story with the 7 Point Model, you can start making a list of possible scenes that will fill your narrative from start to finish.

Have some fun to see if you can list about 15-20 possible scenes for each quarter. If you're having trouble, take a peek at the next lecture for the Story Template model. This model is more detailed and flexible for suggesting story direction.

The Story Template Model:

