

Story Structure:

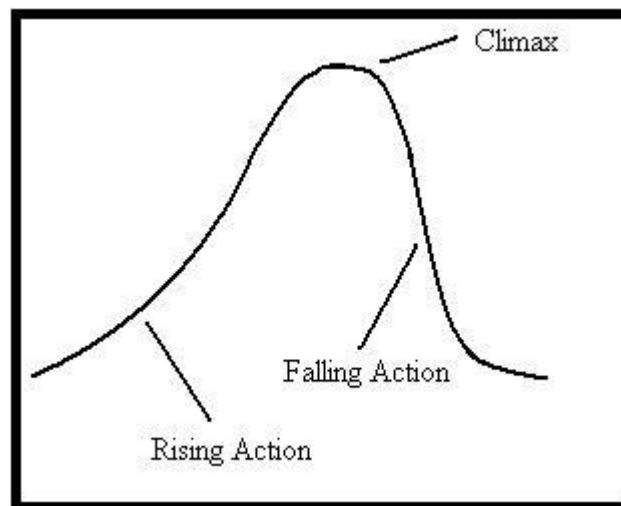
All stories consist of three portions: The rising action, the climax, and the falling action.

The bulk of the story should be the rising action, which consists of presenting the main characters, describing the setting, and introducing the main conflicts. This should be between 75-80% of your story. Within the rising action, you can have mini-cycles of rising action, climax, and falling action as the characters are met with smaller problems surrounding the bigger problem.

The climax of the story is the portion where the characters either resolve or fail to resolve the conflict. This should be the most exciting part of the story, and it usually doesn't take up very much space. Typical examples include a final battle between "the good guys" and "the bad guys," a couple finally proclaiming their love for each other, or a person trapped in the wilderness emerging from those challenges alive.

The falling action, although it doesn't take up much space in your story, is very important to the reader. If your hero is shot in the climax, readers will want to know if he lives or dies and how that bullet will affect his life from there on out. If a couple finally gets together, the reader will want to know that they go on being together after that initial kiss. And if a person survives 8 days without food or water in a blizzard on a mountain, the reader will want to know how that experience shapes life afterward. Many times, the falling action is handled in an epilogue.

This is a diagram of a typical story structure. Note how sharply the falling action drops after the long buildup of rising action to the climax.



Creating Conflict:

All plot movement relies on the main character being in conflict, of which there are six different types. Conflict does not have to be dire, depending on what type of story you are writing. The following is a breakdown of the six types of conflict and how each might be written as serious or humorous.

- **Man vs. Man:** When serious, this could be a cop hunting a criminal, a fistfight, or a couple in the middle of a breakup. A humorous take would be a pie-throwing fight, people wrestling in Sumo costumes, or the way Homer Simpson is always at odds with Ned Flanders.
- **Man vs. Nature:** A serious take on this conflict would be a story about Hurricane Katrina or a firefighter trapped in a raging forest fire. A humorous story might be a woman who just had her hair colored and permed only to step out in a rainstorm or a couple on a picnic being invaded by ants or mosquitos.
- **Man vs. Self:** In a serious story, the main character might be facing an ethical dilemma, such as whether or not to cheat on his taxes in order to feed his family. A humorous story might have a character feeling irresistibly compelled to do something odd like paint everyone's face blue.
- **Man vs. Machine:** A serious version of this conflict might be a woman getting her hand stuck in a blender, leaving her mangled for life. A lighter version would be the scene from *I Love Lucy* where she is working in the chocolate factory and the conveyor belt starts moving faster than she can work.
- **Man vs. Animal:** A non-humorous example of this is a grizzly bear attacking a camper. A funny approach would be a man getting up in the morning feeling like it's going to be a great day and stepping in dog poo first thing.
- **Man vs. Destiny:** A serious version of this might be a man driving to work and getting so stuck in traffic he is fired for being late. A funny version might be a person who always guess the lottery numbers, but misses them all by one digit.

Different genres also require different types of conflict. Here is a list of the main types of stories and how the six conflicts might play out in each one.

- **Mystery:** Most mysteries are going to be man vs. man because you will have the intellect of the detective pitted against the cunning of the criminal. The other types of conflict can be used as obstacles while the detective is solving the crime. For example: using man vs. nature by having the rain destroy footprints or other evidence.
- **Romance:** Most romances will be man vs. man as these stories are all about human relationships. The other types of conflict also serve well as complications in a story, such as a man and a woman who cannot date because his dog wants to eat her cat.
- **Science Fiction and Fantasy:** These stories can actually make use of any of the six conflicts at any time. Robots can become a man vs. machine conflict. An alien landscape is certainly man vs. nature. And depending on how intelligent he is, a dragon might represent man vs. animal or man vs. man. Man vs. destiny is also quite common in fantasy where you often have characters being central to a prophecy.

