

# THE 3-ACT NOVEL STRUCTURE

A UNIVERSAL STORY FRAMEWORK FOR NOVELS OF MANY LENGTHS, GENRES, AND STYLES

## THE STRUCTURE HELPS WRITERS

THIS 3-ACT STRUCTURE HELPS YOU PLOT WITHOUT FORCING A FORMULA ON YOUR NOVEL.

THINK OF STRUCTURING YOUR WORK THIS WAY:

BEGINNING = DISRUPTION    MIDDLE = DEVELOPMENT    END = RESOLUTION



## ACT I

### BEGINNING, DISRUPTION, DECISION

ACT I INTRODUCES THE PROTAGONIST'S REALITY, REVEALS WHAT IS UNSTABLE, AND BRINGS IN THE CHANGE THAT SETS THE STORY IN MOTION.

SUGGESTED RANGE: 4–12 CHAPTERS (~20–25% OF THE NOVEL)



#### ACT I CHECKLIST

- ESTABLISH THE PROTAGONIST
- SHOW THE CURRENT WORLD OR EMOTIONAL STATE
- INTRODUCE TENSIONS, DESIRES, OR RELATIONSHIPS
- BRING IN A DISRUPTION OR DESTABILIZING EVENT
- CREATE PRESSURE
- END WITH A DECISION OR IRREVERSIBLE SHIFT

WHAT HAPPENS THAT FORCES THE STORY TO BEGIN?

## ACT II

### DEVELOPMENT, PRESSURE, TRANSFORMATION

ACT II IS WHERE THE STORY DEEPENS. THE PROTAGONIST MOVES THROUGH CONFLICT, DISCOVERY, CHANGE, SETBACK, AND REVELATION. THIS IS OFTEN THE LONGEST AND MOST TRANSFORMATIVE PART OF THE NOVEL.

SUGGESTED RANGE: 8–30 CHAPTERS (~50–60% OF THE NOVEL)

#### PART I OF ACT II CHECKLIST

##### ENTRY AND ADJUSTMENT

- NEW TERRITORY
- NEW RULES OR TENSIONS
- ATTEMPTS AND EARLY CONSEQUENCES
- SMALL SUCCESSES
- RISING COMPLICATIONS

#### MIDPOINT

A MEANINGFUL SHIFT IN UNDERSTANDING, STAKES, OR DIRECTION

#### EXAMPLES

REVELATION, LOSS, REVERSAL, CONFESSION, DISCOVERY, COMMITMENT, EXPOSURE

#### PART II OF ACT II CHECKLIST

##### ESCALATION AND RECKONING

- PRESSURE INTENSIFIES
- RELATIONSHIPS STRAIN
- TRUTHS SURFACE
- CONTROL BEGINS TO FAIL
- THE PROTAGONIST REACHES A BREAKING POINT
- A NEW CLARITY BEGINS TO EMERGE

WHAT MUST THE PROTAGONIST FACE IN ORDER TO BECOME CAPABLE OF THE ENDING?



### CONFRONTATION, CONSEQUENCE, RESOLUTION

ACT III BRINGS THE STORY'S DEEPEST TENSIONS TO A HEAD. THE PROTAGONIST MUST ACT, CHOOSE, CONFRONT, OR ACCEPT WHAT THE STORY HAS REVEALED.

SUGGESTED RANGE: 4–12 CHAPTERS (~20–25% OF THE NOVEL)

#### ACT III CHECKLIST

- FINAL MOVEMENT TOWARD CONFRONTATION
- DECISIVE ACTION OR EMOTIONAL RECKONING
- RESOLUTION OF THE CENTRAL CONFLICT
- CONSEQUENCES AND AFTERMATH
- EVIDENCE OF CHANGE
- A RESONANT CLOSING IMAGE

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW, AND WHAT DID IT COST?



## ACT III

A STRONG STRUCTURE DOES NOT MAKE EVERY NOVEL FEEL THE SAME. IT HELPS THE STORY KEEP MOVING TOWARD MEANING. USE THIS FRAMEWORK AS GUIDANCE, NOT LAW, AND LET YOUR STORY FIND ITS NATURAL SHAPE.