

Workshop Presented by Crystal Caudill

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Character Goals

- Goals are the what that a character wants that sends them on a journey throughout the story.
 - Generally, they will fall under one of three categories:
 - Possession of Something
 - Relief from Something
 - Revenge of Something
 - Characters must have a powerful why for their goal so they don't give up when things get hard.
 - Your goal needs to have stakes, or consequences if they fail to meet their goal.
 - Stakes can be physical consequences, relationship consequences, or psychological consequences.
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The Four Act Structure - Diagrams at the End

*Disasters are the events that change the direction of the story without the character's permission and leave the character with a life-altering choice to make. These happen at key points in every story, and there are usually at least three—one in each act of the story. Note, there can always be more. These are often referred to as plot twists.

**Obstacles are not as life-altering as disasters but they are challenges that grow the stakes and tension, while equipping your protagonist with the skills, knowledge, and/or connections needed to support them during the disasters and big decisions. Remember settings can play into obstacle creation.

Act 1: The Beginning

- about 25% of your story
- Purpose: To establish the tone, genre, and expectations for what the rest of the story will be about.
 - Follow genre guidelines when plotting your beginning.

- Ordinary life - what your character is like when they walk onto the page
 - Are they happy?
 - What do they think they want?
 - What is frustrating them right now?
 - What problems are they facing?
- Inciting Incident - the event in the story that changes the course of the character's life and sets them on a journey
 - events can impact characters physically, relationally, and/or psychologically
 - the character will have a choice to make and will act upon it
 - sometimes the choice is not to act and then an outside force pushes them to act
- The Point of No Return - The character makes a decision and acts upon it. They cannot go back to life as it was before, no matter what decision is made.
 - What choices did the character have? What choice did they make?
 - What are the consequences of that choice?
 - What is their goal? What are the stakes?

Act 2: The Middle

- about 50% of your story
- Purpose: A series of mini-goals, obstacles, and disasters that propel your character along their journey with increasing stakes and tension while equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and connections needed for the big end.
 - Characters should have a mixture of victories and failures to encourage and challenge them.
 - Every victory must lead to a new challenge, and each challenge needs to be harder than the one before.
 - No matter what happens, you always want your character drawing nearer or farther away from the goal.
- **Tip:** Consider the mini-goals a character must achieve in order to reach their main goal, and then create obstacles to oppose those mini-goals.
 - What would be a natural obstacle to the goal?
 - Will they overcome or fail an obstacle?
 - What will be their response to the obstacle?
 - What are the consequences to their response?

- Man in the Mirror Moment - The character examines a truth about themselves or the situation and makes a decision on how to move forward.
 - This concept was developed by James Scott Bell in *Write Your Novel from the Middle*.
 - The MIM Moment comes about half way through the story.

- Character Driven MIM Moment - the moment of self-reflection when a character examines a truth about themselves or their situation
 - They may ask:
 - Who am I?
 - What am I becoming?
 - If I continue how will I be different?
 - What will I have to do to overcome my inner challenges?
 - How will I have to change in order to battle successfully?
 - Choosing to make a change doesn't solve the problem, the character will struggle to make they change they want, having successes and failures along the way.

- Plot Driven MIM Moment - the moment when a character examines the odds against them and determines how to move forward
 - At this point, the forces against them seem so vast that there is no way to go on and not face certain death.
 - Death can be physical, professional, or psychological.

- The Middle - Part 2B - The character continues toward their goal facing new and harder obstacles.
 - Obstacles are faced using what they learned in the Man in the Mirror Moment.
 - There will be missteps and backslides if the character is trying to change something about them,
 - A disaster will occur that will send the character to their lowest point.

- Black Moment - the moment where the character is at their lowest and they face their worst fears
 - End of the Middle
 - This is the biggest disaster of all.
 - Hit your character at all their weak points.
 - All seems lost, and they struggle to hope for a happy ending.

Act 3: The End

- The Choice - the character's response to the black moment as a changed person
 - They are not the same person they were at the beginning of the story.
 - They have grown and changed.
 - They have the tools and knowledge needed to defeat the enemy.
 - They may need a reminder from a side character.

- The Final Battle & Victory - the showdown between and victory over the largest obstacle to their goal
 - The battle must be hard won, if too easily defeated, the reader is let down.
 - The character will face his fears and remember who he is now is not the same person he was at the beginning of the journey.
 - The character overcomes and wins their goal.

- New Life & Happily Ever after
 - Readers get a glimpse of the new, better normal.
 - Loose ends are tied up.
 - We see how meeting the goal has changed their life.
 - Happily Ever Afters don't have to be perfectly happy, but they should leave the reader with a sense of hope.

Suggested Books

The Story Equation by Susan May Warren
The Dance of Character & Plot by DiAnn Mills
Goal, Conflict, & Motivation by Debra Dixon
Write Your Novel from the Middle by James Scott Bell
Plot and Structure by James Scott Bell
Story Trumps Structure by Steven James
The Snowflake Method by Randy Ingermanson

Four Act Structure

1 Act 1: The Beginning

ORDINARY LIFE

WHO THEY ARE WHEN THEY WALK ON THE PAGE

INCITING INCIDENT

EVENT THAT CHANGES THE COURSE OF THE CHARACTER'S LIFE AND SETS THEM ON THE JOURNEY

POINT OF NO RETURN

LIFE CANNOT GO BACK TO WHAT IT WAS BEFORE

2 Act 2: The Middle

OBSTACLES

OPPOSITION TO MINI-GOALS

DISASTER

CHANGES DIRECTION OF THE STORY

MAN IN THE MIRROR

EXAMINES TRUTH ABOUT SELF OR SITUATION

OBSTACLES

OPPOSITION TO MINI-GOALS

DISASTER

CHANGES DIRECTION OF THE STORY

BLACK MOMENT

ALL IS LOST, WORST FEAR IS FACED

3 Act 3: The End

THE CHOICE

CHARACTER'S RESPONSE TO THE BLACK MOMENT AS A CHANGED PERSON

FINAL BATTLE & VICTORY

SHOW DOWN BETWEEN OBSTACLE AND GOAL, CHARACTER IS VICTORIOUS

NEW LIFE & HAPPILY EVER AFTER

LOOSE ENDS TIED UP, GLIMPSE OF LIFE AFTER GOAL

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* Number of Obstacles vary. This is just an example.