

## Narrative Structure

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**Plot** is what happens in a story, and **structure** is the order in which the film presents the plot. **Narrative structure** is the shape of a story.

When you sit down to watch a film the narrative structure help defines the story. It needs to be structured to help the viewer understand the message contained within, giving the film meaning throughout. However you need to keep in mind that the narrative structure only applies to the way in which a story is told not the story itself.....meaning the narrative structure is the chronological stages or steps that progress from one to the other throughout the story.

The conventional narrative structure pointed out by Tzvetan Todorov as a rule has five stages though this can be rudimentary broken down to three stages, a beginning (state of equilibrium), middle (disruption to the equilibrium) and end (reinstate the equilibrium). Equilibrium is simply just a state of balance, normality in which the characters find themselves at the beginning.

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### **Stage 1**

A state of equilibrium is defined.

### **Stage 2**

Disruption to the equilibrium by some action or crisis.

### **Stage3**

The Character(s) recognition that there has been a disruption, setting goals to resolve problem.

### **Stage4**

The Character(s) attempt to repair the disruption, obstacles need to be overcome to restore order.

### **Stage5**

Reinstatement to the equilibrium. Situation is resolved, a conclusion is announced.

With the five stage layout the narrative becomes more comprehensive. However its essential to remember films need to be seamless as the chain of events unfold, with all the questions raised answered and all the loose ends tied up unless you want to break the conventions, induce a cliff hanger, intentionally create doubt in the minds of the audience and leave them questioning.

Even though these stages are presented here as a linear structure there is no golden rule that it has to be this way, especially if you wish to create a non-linear structure. Should you wish to you can always muddle up the chronological order and have the end at the beginning. Remember a film should have clear goals with believable characters if it's to maintain a sense of credibility and to help keep the audience captivated.

Listed below are six different types of narrative structure.

## **Chronological or linear structure**

This is where the story is written in the time sequence that it took place.

## **Multi-narrative**

This is when more than one voice is telling the story. Different points of view of characters are given.

## **Dual-narrative**

This is when two stories run alongside each other. It may be two people telling the same story or just two different ones that alternate.

## **Flashbacks**

This is when the narrative moves back in time.

## **Fragmented narrative**

This is when the story is all over the place. We just get bits of it from past and present and future and have to work out what happened and in what order for ourselves.

## **Metafictive**

A story within a story within a story within a story again. (The prefix 'meta' is Greek for 'again' meaning literally, 'fiction again'.