

Seven Key Steps of Story Structure

Adapted from John Truby's *The Anatomy of Story*

Weakness and Need → Desire → Opponent → Plan →
[War that culminates in the final] Battle → Self-revelation → New Equilibrium

Instructions: According to Truby, "The seven steps are not imposed from the outside; they are embedded in the story idea itself" (52). So let's begin with your story idea. You've already created a detailed character for an initial sketch. Write notes below for what you envision for your main character/hero in this story.

→ **Point A (the Beginning):** Briefly introduce your hero/protagonist: Who is he or she? Where does she live/work/go to school? What's the home/family situation? **And** what's going on in his or her life when the story opens?

This is your hero's status (state of balance) before a problem occurs that knocks things off kilter.

NOTES:

Now introduce your hero in one sentence: _____

→ **Point B (the End):** Where do you see your hero at the end of the story? How will he or she be in a different place (mentally, emotionally, spiritually, etc.) at the end—how will your hero have changed? Why? What will he or she have learned?

This becomes your hero's new status—his or her "new normal" where life is once again balanced.

Think about it: we never deal with conflict and land in the same place where we began.

NOTES:

In one sentence: _____

So how do you get from Point A to Point B?

1. Start with giving your hero **Weakness** and **Need**. *Keep it simple and straightforward.*

What goal does your hero want to reach by the end of the story? Why? What's at stake? [DESIRE]

Against what/whom is your hero going to struggle in order to reach that goal (desire)?

What is the inciting incident that kicks off the conflict by creating a problem that he or she will need to resolve by the end of the story?

How did this problem originate?

- ➔ What struggles (battles) will he or she face in order to achieve the goal? Against what antagonist (opponent)?

Now study the notes you made above, and figure out the seven structure steps. *KEY POINT: Start with the self-revelation at the end of the story; then go back to the beginning and figure out your hero's need and desire (52).*

→ **Main character:**

→ **Psychological self-revelation:** *(Be specific about what your hero learns at the end about what he does that hurts himself.)*

→ **Moral self-revelation (if applicable):** *(Be specific about what your hero learns at the end about what he does that hurts others.)*

→ **Weakness and Need:** After determining your hero's self-revelation, go back to the beginning and figure out his or her needs. Start by giving your hero not just one or two, but many weaknesses—"serious flaws, so deep and dangerous that they are ruining your hero's life or have the real possibility of doing so" (53).

→ **Problem:** "What is the problem or crisis your hero faces at the beginning of the story? Try to make it an outgrowth of his or her weakness" (53).

→ **Desire:** Be specific! "Make sure your hero's goal is one that will lead him to the end of the story and force him to take a number of actions to accomplish it" (53).

→ **Opponent:** "Create an opponent who wants the same goal as the hero and who is exceptionally good at attacking your hero's greatest weakness" (54). Out of all the potential opponents you could derive, pick the *best* one.

Start by going back to that crucial question: What is the deepest conflict the hero and opponent are fighting about? You want your main opponent to be just as obsessed with winning the goal as the hero. You want to give your opponent a special ability to attack your hero's greatest weakness, and to do so incessantly while he tries to win the goal. (54)

→**Plan:** “Create a plan that requires the hero to take a number of actions but also to adjust when the initial plan doesn’t work” (54).

What Truby calls the “Plan,” we’ve studied primarily as the “War” (according to Mel McKee)—the series of battles that begins with the hero’s plan of attack and continues with all the events (battles) that take place (punch-counterpunch) until reaching the final battle—the moment of crisis that will determine the outcome of the war. It is intrinsically tied to the self-revelation.

→**[Final] Battle:** involves the hero and the main opponent and will decide, once and for all, who wins the goal; must be an intense experience—puts the hero to the ultimate test

(We started with the self-revelation.)

→**New Equilibrium:** What is the new balanced state, now that the war is over? Has your hero risen to a higher level, or has he or she fallen to a lower one? What fundamental change has taken place as a result of the hero’s going through his or her crucible?

ADD: Setting

ADD: Point of View

ADD: Foreshadowing

ADD: Irony

ADD: Figurative language