

# Novel Plotting Worksheet

Turn an idea into a developing story

A premise gives you something interesting to explore. A plot develops when characters pursue goals, meet resistance, make decisions and create consequences that change what can happen next.

Use this worksheet to trace the movement of your novel from its opening situation through conflict, turning points and escalation to climax and resolution. It is not a formula or a demand for a fixed number of acts. Its purpose is to help you see whether events are connected by cause, choice and consequence.

Complete it before drafting, while a manuscript is developing, or during revision when the story feels as though it has lost direction.

## Story at a Glance

**Working Title:**

**What is the central story idea or premise?**

**Who is driving the story, and what do they want?**

**What central conflict or opposition prevents easy success?**

**What is at stake if the protagonist fails?**

**What fundamental change should the story produce by the end?**

# The Story Path

## From Opening to Resolution

Think of these stages as functions rather than compulsory structural positions. Each should alter the situation sufficiently to create the conditions for what follows.

### Opening

What situation, problem, desire or disturbance gives the reader a reason to enter the story?

### Conflict

What prevents the protagonist from continuing as before or simply achieving what they want?

### Turning Point

What decision, discovery, reversal or consequence significantly changes the direction of the story?

### Escalation

How do obstacles, risks, costs or consequences become more difficult to avoid?

### Climax

What decisive confrontation, choice or action brings the story's central pressures together?

### Resolution

What has changed because of what happened, and what consequences remain?

**Which stage currently feels least developed or convincing?**

**What needs to happen earlier for that stage to feel earned?**

# Plot Progression Tracker

## Connect Events Through Cause and Consequence

Use the tracker for major scenes, sequences or turning points. The key question is not simply what happens next, but why the next development occurs because of what has already happened.

| Scene / Sequence | Character Goal | Obstacle / Conflict | Decision / Action | Immediate Consequence | What Changes Next? |
|------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
|                  |                |                     |                   |                       |                    |
|                  |                |                     |                   |                       |                    |
|                  |                |                     |                   |                       |                    |
|                  |                |                     |                   |                       |                    |
|                  |                |                     |                   |                       |                    |
|                  |                |                     |                   |                       |                    |

### After completing the tracker, ask:

- Does each major development arise from something established earlier?
- Do character decisions help create the next problem rather than merely react to events?
- Are consequences carried forward instead of disappearing after a scene ends?
- Does opposition change or intensify as the protagonist adapts?
- Are important turning points prepared for without becoming predictable?
- Does the story become progressively harder to abandon, reverse or escape?

### Weakest link in the cause-and-consequence chain:

### Possible change to strengthen it:

# The Plot Audit

## Test the Story as a Whole

Use this final check to identify structural weaknesses. A strong plot does not require constant action; it requires meaningful progression in which goals, obstacles, choices and consequences continually reshape the story.

- The opening establishes a situation worth following.
- The protagonist has a goal or need capable of generating action.
- Opposition prevents the central problem from being solved easily.
- Major events are connected by cause and consequence.
- Character decisions materially affect what happens next.
- Turning points change the direction, meaning or possibilities of the story.
- Conflict develops rather than simply repeating in different locations.
- Stakes, costs or consequences become increasingly significant.
- Subplots support, complicate or illuminate the central story rather than distract from it.
- The climax grows from pressures and choices established earlier.
- The resolution shows the consequences of the climax.
- The ending answers the story's central dramatic question while reflecting meaningful change.

**Where does the story currently lose momentum? Why?**

**Which event or decision creates the strongest change in direction?**

**What single structural change would most strengthen the story?**

**Remember:** Plot is more than a sequence of events. A story gains momentum when what happens next becomes a consequence of what characters wanted, chose, discovered or failed to prevent.

Designed to complement *Plotting for Novelists* by Jim Moore.

[thewritersblackbook.com](http://thewritersblackbook.com)