

Story Shape #3 Novel Writing Linda Clare

The classic story arc begins with the **inciting incident**. This event can be defined as the point **after which nothing would ever be the same, the thing which started it all, the time the character could no longer ignore the problem but is forced to act in some way.**

Most stories begin with:

The Set-up (Act I) which goes through these stages:

- Ordinary Time: Showing the character just before the **inciting incident**, introduces us to the main characters, setting and time.
- Inciting Incident: The event or change (in attitude, circumstances or belief) that changes the character's world drastically. May introduce supporting cast, antagonist.
- The first obstacle (adversary, group, force of nature or sometimes the self) appears. Simply stated, "Things get worse."

The Build-up (Act II)

This is the bulk of the story, where the stated theme, problem and events play out on stage.

- We learn more about the main character and what the character's strengths and weaknesses are.
- **Subplots** unfold and are woven carefully into the main story.
- Tension mounts in each succeeding scene, building to a crescendo Act II ends just before the Climax.

The Pay-off (Act III)

This part should be about four-fifths into the story.

- The climax occurs when the character must act. No more negotiating, ignoring or switching attitudes by the protagonist.
- Tension should be at its highest in the climax scene/scenes. This is the "do or die" moment. Regardless of how many other viewpoints used in the novel, at this point the main character should be acting on the novel's major problem, and that character should solve the problem with as little assistance as possible.
- The climax should be the main character's "aha" moment, when all he/she has learned is brought to bear on the obstacle(s)

Resolution or Denouement

- After the climax scenes, tie up all other subplots as quickly as possible and end the novel.
- Reader must understand how the character has grown or changed.
- Only five outcomes are possible: 1) Character wins, is happy; 2) loses, is happy, or the opposite, 3-4), and 5) is apathetic (not recommended.)