

Storytelling is one of the oldest pastimes. Everyone loves a great story, but it is often difficult to find someone that is good at telling one.

The best way to learn how to tell a story is to read books on the subject, such as “How to Tell a Story” by Peter Rubie and Gary Provost, or any other book published by *Writers Digest Books*. Most people, unfortunately never take the time to learn basic storytelling techniques, and when they try to tell a tale, they find themselves losing their audience.

Others refuse to study storytelling techniques because they fear they will lose their creativity by following formulaic story structures.

However, like building a house, there are definite things that you need to know in order to tell a story. Learning how to read blueprints, how to swing a hammer, and how to install a roof are as essential to a carpenter as learning how to set up a story, how to write a basic plot outline and how to write a scene are to the storyteller.

So here is a quick primer on how to tell a story. Hopefully, those reading it will be able to gain some insight into the subject, to the pleasure of their future audiences.

Stories consist of three parts. The beginning, the middle, and the end. Traditionally, this is why stories are broken down into three acts.

There are six parts of a story contained within these three segments:

Act I

1. Introduction.
2. Rising Action.

Act II

3. Complications.
4. Crisis.

Act III

5. Climax.
6. Resolution.

The beginning (Act I) has three goals.

The first goal is to get the ball rolling by ***introducing the main characters***, & the ***setting*** they are in.

The second goal is to ***hook your audience*** with something that is exciting and interesting.

The third goal in the start of a story is to ***introduce the villain*** and the main ***story goal***.

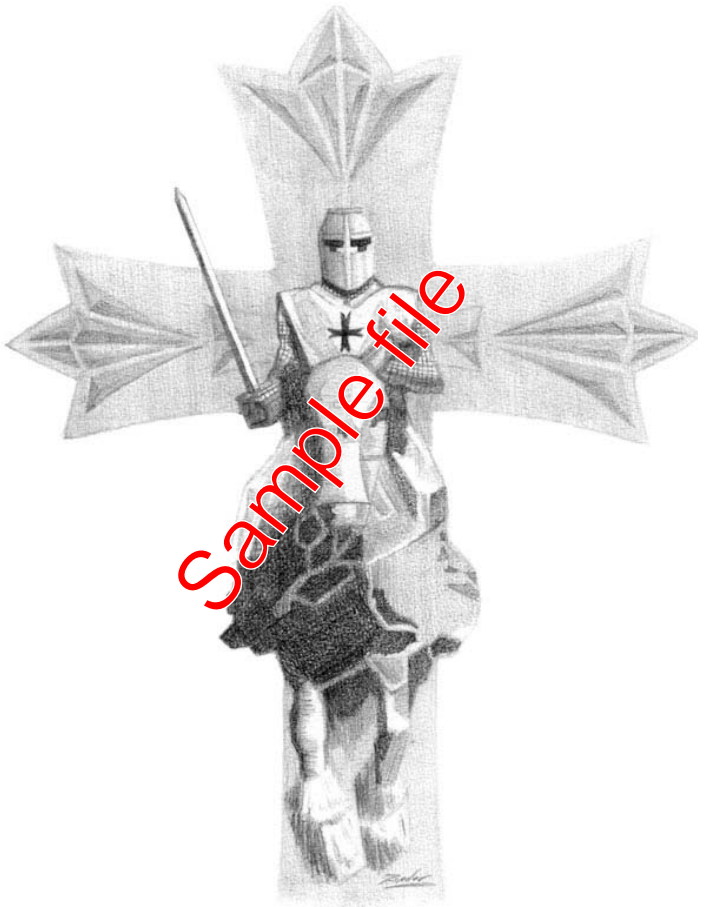
All three goals should be accomplished very quickly, often in the first scene.

Choosing a **setting** depends of the kind of story that is being told, and the desires of the *Storyteller*. For instance, a gothic adventure could take place in Hungary or Transylvania, and could be set in the 15th or 16th century. Arthurian tales would take place in England, in an earlier time period. The setting will have a large affect on the way the story is told.

The **characters** will often take up a large part of the opening of a story, and this can slow things down considerably. Care should be taken to avoid lengthy character introductions, as it can kill a story before it has begun. One of the marks of an amateur *Storyteller* is to use up a large part of the early story introducing characters.

Characters are defined by what they do, not by who they appear to be. A person's actions speak louder than everything else. Many people begin describing a character by their appearance, but in reality these physical traits are the least important things about a person. *Characters should enter a story doing something.*

Good characters will have an **inner need**, such as a need to fall in love, and this internal goal will



influence all of the character's actions. Characters also need to have a **main character flaw**, such as a distrust of the opposite sex. Characters may have many flaws, but one will override the others, and **it will block the character's inner need**, preventing the character from getting what he truly wants. Character flaws can be such things as a quick temper, a desire to become rich and powerful, cowardice, etc.

It has been said that **a story is not what happens, but who it happens to**. A story is about how a character changes by the events in the plot, or said another way; a story is about how a character overcomes his failings.

Many have argued over which aspect of a story is more important, the plot or the characters. In a good story, they will both support each other.

The **plot** consists of the events that take place in the story. The plot directs what happens in the **outer story**. It is often called the **spine** of the story.

The characters control what happens in the **inner story**, by how they react to events of the plot. This part of the tale is also called the **heart** of the story.

In this way, a good story will consist of two stories being told at once, in parallel to each other.

A good character will always have some level of **internal conflict**. *Inner conflict is created by the character's inner need rubbing against a main character flaw.* This conflict can often be expressed as two emotions fighting against each other. For instance, a character may be greedy, but will also have a need for people to trust him. In a treasure hunting story, the character could be confronted with a situation where his greed will come in direct conflict with his need to be trusted. A good *Storyteller* will often design his plots to affect the characters internal conflicts, so that the characters will be able to overcome their flaws.

Stories are about how a character changes over time by the events in the plot.

The second goal in the start of the story is to hook your audience with an interesting event. This event is often called the **inciting incident**.

The inciting incident is an event that drastically alters the character's reality, propelling them into the story. The event must be something that will practically force the characters into the story. Some examples could include the destruction of the character's town by a marauding army or an angry dragon, the kidnapping of the characters girlfriend by a band of vikings,