

## The Plot Diagram - The Structural Blueprint of Prose

The way a novel or short story is put together directly points to the structure of the novel or short story. The short story is not as long as a novel, however it selects a small aspect of life. Characters are generally few and the characteristic traits of a person are normally kept few. The setting is usually restricted to a small area - not distributed over many places, as in the case of a novel.

The usual plot structure of these stories is the presentation of an **initial situation**, then the **complication** of the story (giving the nature of the conflict) which reaches a high point of interest or the **climax**. The details that inform the complication may also be referred to as the **rising action**. Finally the story tapers to a **resolution**. The details that fall between the climax and the resolution is called **falling action**.

Understanding the structure of prose translates into the reader's ability to determine:

1. What happens? (the series of events);
2. To whom the incident happens? (the characters);
3. When and why the incident happens? (examining the story's themes which shape the meaning of the characters' thoughts and actions or lack thereof); and
4. How is the story divided? (in chapters or units?)

Generally the short story aims to provide insight into a character, situation and/or life based on events, behaviour and/or feelings in a confined setting or situation. Events are therefore compressed in time, occurring within hours but not usually over years.