



## NARRATIVE ARC

What kind of story are you telling?

Outlining or critically approaching your manuscript's revisions requires you to step back from the "author" role and objectively evaluate the elements within your book using an editorial lens. Use this tool as a walkthrough of four basic narrative arcs to ensure cohesion of your narrative arc.

### 3-ACT

The *3-act* narrative follows a story's basic and popular structure describing its beginning, middle, and end. It's quite simple and a good starting point for many writers in determining their narrative arc. Readers start at the story's beginning and follow the viewpoint character or protagonist to the end. A *3-act* narrative arc builds out the story components in three chunks:

- 1) Setup to introduce the main characters and establish the setting;
- 2) Confrontation of a problem that may seem small but becomes more complex;
- and 3) Resolution, which includes high stakes, challenges and character growth, and a solution to tie it all together.

### IN MEDIAS RES

When starting a novel *in medias res* (literally, "in the midst of things"), the story opens at the heart of the action. I don't necessarily mean a firefight or a car chase (unless those types of heat scenes fit your genre). But something is already taking place, and the reader steps into the middle of it with the first sentence. There are no pages to waste on backstory, setting, or description. Readers will learn of those elements as the story progresses.

An *in medias res* story requires a solid hook from the get-go, so your reader keeps reading. Quickly establish a central question or mystery, something the reader invests in solving. Hold some of the information back to get your readers' puzzle-solving neurons firing to fill in the gaps as they scour the text for clues and context. The narrative arc consists of 1) rising action, 2) explanation/backstory, 3) climax, 4) falling action, and 5) resolution.

### THE HERO'S JOURNEY

The *hero's journey* arc is popular in speculative fiction because of the draw or push to an "other" world or place. The viewpoint character or protagonist goes on a journey—literally. The reader starts at the story's beginning before the journey, learns how the viewpoint character becomes involved in the journey, and follows them through it.

A *hero's journey* story has a few basic parts: 1) The call to adventure; 2) Threshold; 3) A Mentor; 4) Revelation; 5) Transformation; 6) Atonement; and 7) The return. Within these parts, there may be a form of supernatural aid, several intermediary helpers, or the return home may be accompanied by a reward or gift.

### 7-POINT

When writing a story using the *7-point* system, advocates recommend starting with the resolution and working backward. Why? To ensure a dramatic arc for the hero. Like an *in medias res* story, a *7-point* story requires a hook from the get-go. But instead of starting in the middle of the action, readers start at...well, the beginning.

The *7-point* story has defined points: 1) The protagonist's starting point; 2) A conflict that moves the story to its midpoint; 3) Pressure on the protagonist trying to achieve their goal; 4) The midpoint, in which the protagonist responds to the conflict with action; 5) More pressure on the protagonist; 6) A conflict that moves the story from midpoint to resolution; and 7) The climax, which contrasts the protagonist's starting point.