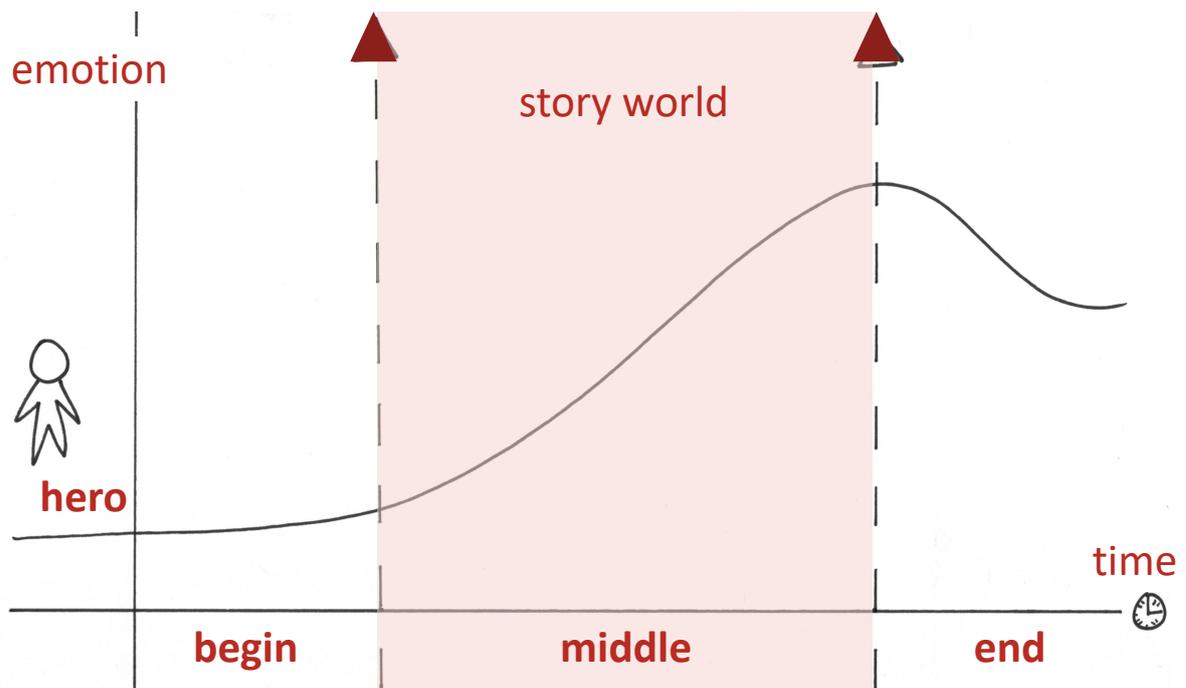

STORY STRUCTURE

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INTRODUCTION

A story is essentially a series of events brought into relation to each other with a unifying narrative line. Structure is the basis of all good stories. The structure introduced here is a combination of Aristotle's most basic structure and the complex structure of the heroic journey as described by Joseph Conrad and later by Christopher Vogler.

A basic story structure has a beginning, middle, and end. It also has a hero, a turning point, and a goal/climax. When you put those events together over time against emotion, they look like this.



The emotional journey, with emotions rising and then settling again at the end of the story, represents the audience's experience of the story over the time that it takes to tell the story. The line between the beginning and the middle is the turning point and the line between the middle and the end represents the goal or climax of the story.

HERO

The hero determines the point of view of the story. Decide on who the hero is first.

Once you figure out who the hero is, figure out what the qualities and shortcomings of the hero are. Some of these will be important to share with the audience. Try to do this in terms of actions, not descriptions. Don't tell your audience that the hero is generous, tell your audience that the hero once gave the hat and gloves she was wearing to a friend on a winter day.

The true nature of your hero will be shown to the audience by the choices that the hero makes throughout the story.

GOAL

The goal is the thing the hero is trying to accomplish throughout the story. This can be as simple as making a chicken dinner on Sunday and as complicated as saving the earth from certain destruction. The hero's goal should be clear, and it should be important enough to propel the hero through the challenges that the story will present. The goal does not have to be achievable.

BEGINNING

This is where you as the storyteller set the scene for the audience. Remember that the beginning is more than the first thing you say. It's everything that happens in the first part of the story. The scene is the hero's ordinary world includes a place, time, and players in the story. The length of time it takes to do this should be proportionate to the length of the story. Be careful to avoid getting caught up in details that are unimportant or could be shared later in the story at the right moment. Start with the familiar and lead the audience and the hero towards the unfamiliar.

TURNING POINT

This is when the hero decides to take the plunge, try to accomplish the goal, and move into the story world. The story world is a place where the rules are a little different than in the ordinary world and the hero is unfamiliar with everything she will encounter. At the turning point, the hero either chooses to go or is forced into the story world. This is a pivotal moment both in the story and in the hero's experience.

MIDDLE

The middle of a story consists of a series of events that ultimately lead to the hero achieving their goal, or not. There are triumphs and failures. There are friends and enemies. It's important here that every incident included contributes to the story in some way, either moving the hero towards the goal or revealing more about the hero or the story world. This section makes up the bulk of the story.

CLIMAX (WAS THE GOAL)

The middle of the journey ends with the hero either achieving the goal or not. This is the moment with the greatest emotional weight. Everything depends on this moment.



END

After the climax, the hero returns to the ordinary world. This return can be sudden or gradual. While the ordinary world is more or less unchanged, the hero has been changed by her experience and will interact with the ordinary world differently. The experience in the story world has brought about a permanent change in the hero.

PROCESS

When you plan a story, which you should do before you write it, work in the following order.

1. Hero
2. Goal
3. Beginning
4. Turning Point
5. Middle
6. End

INSPIRATION

The following podcasts are great resources for storytelling and ideas about how to turn research into a story.

- This American Life
- RadioLab
- Malcom Gladwell's Revisionist History
- The Moth

SOURCES

Conrad, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey*

