



An Introduction to...

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**Narrative Structure**

# Learning Objective

To understand a classic linear narrative structure and how this can be subverted.

# Success Criteria

- To understand a linear narrative structure.
- To understand why linear narrative structures are sometimes subverted.
- To explore key narrative techniques.

# Story Time!

Think of a famous fairy story or myth.

Summarise it into five short sentences.

- 1) Don't include names – just use generic nouns such as 'girl', 'boy', 'prince', 'dog', etc.
- 2) Don't include the title of the story.

Now share the story with your partner. Can they guess the title?

# Story Structures

How easy did you find it to summarise your story into five stages?

If you had to describe each stage of the story, how would you do it?

Events reach a climax – everything comes to a head.

Loose ends start to become tied up.

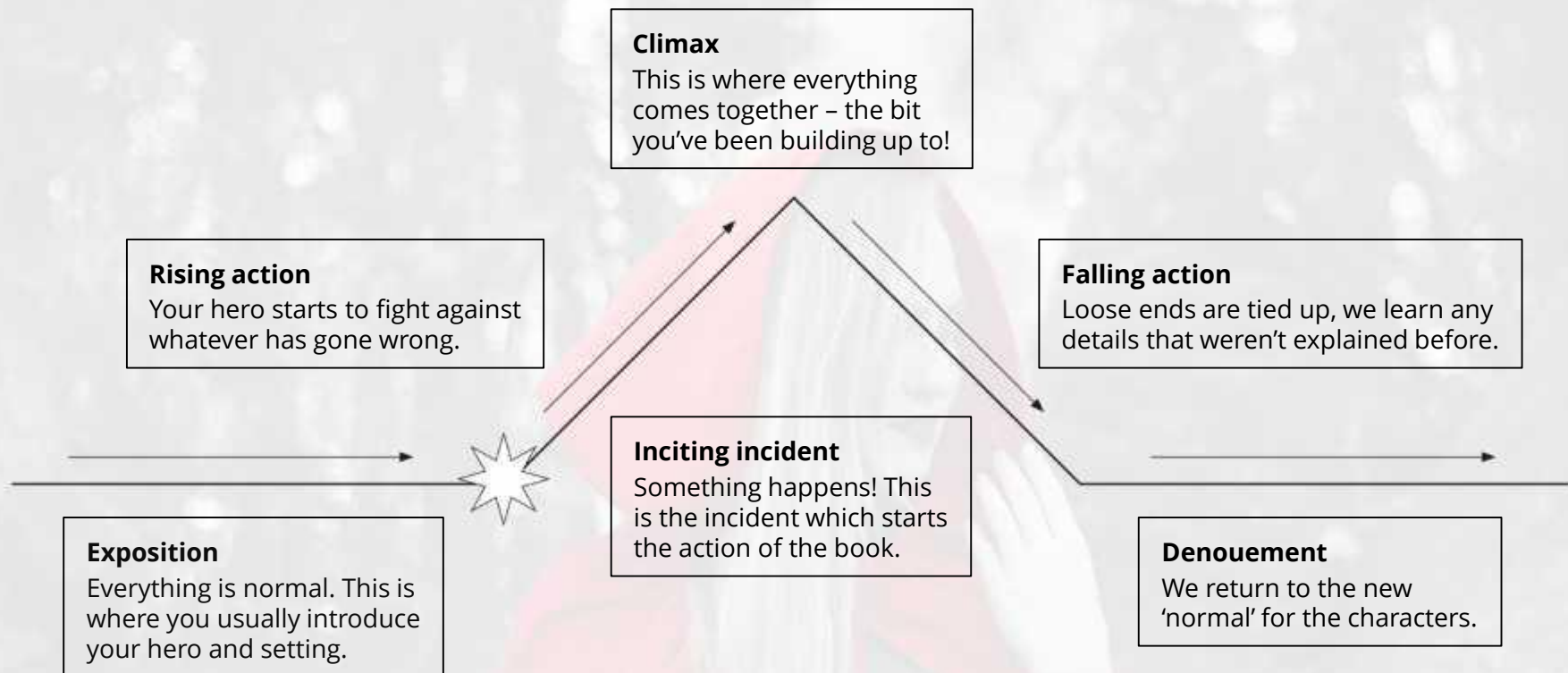
The end where everything returns to a new 'normal'.

The beginning where we find out about the characters and setting.

Something goes wrong, and the main character or characters try to solve the problem.

# Narrative Structure

Most stories follow a set pattern. This pattern is sometimes called a **classic narrative structure** or **narrative arc** or **linear narrative**. It looks like this:



# Pause!

Can you think of any problems with using a classic narrative structure for a story?



# Non-Linear Narrative

Sometimes, authors experiment or play with **narrative** to make the **story** more interesting for their readers. If they change the linear structure, this is known as **subverting the narrative**.

Can you think of ways an author could play with the order of their narrative?

## Key Terms

Story:

A series of events in chronological order, often fictional.

Narrative:

The way the events are told – this doesn't have to be in chronological order. Details can be withheld, or told to the audience at a later date.

# Pick a Task!

Pick one of the tasks below to show how well you understand linear and non-linear narrative:

## **Bronze:**

Create a poster about the different narrative techniques you have learned about this lesson.

## **Silver:**

Take the story you told at the start of the lesson and rewrite it, using at least two narrative techniques to make the story more interesting.

## **Gold:**

Think of a story you know (a book, film or TV programme) that has been told using different narrative techniques and write an explanation of how and why those techniques are used.



# What Is It?

Without looking at your worksheet, can you explain what these different techniques are?

When a story starts in the middle of an event and then goes back to the beginning of the event, this is called **flashback**.  
When a story starts in the middle of an event and then goes forward to the end of the event, this is called **flashforward**.  
When a story starts in the middle of an event and then goes back to the beginning of the event, this is called **flashback**.



# An Introduction to... Narrative Structure

## Narrative Structure Terms

Can you find definitions for these narrative terms?

Term	Definition
Backstory	
Cliffhanger	
Foreshadowing	
Flashback	
Flashforward	
Framing device	
In media res	
Red herring	
Twist	

Term	Definition
Backstory	When the narrative reveals important information about a character's background, which happened before the narrative began.
Cliffhanger	When the narrative ends on a dramatic event. This doesn't mean the end of the narrative – just that it has paused. It is a device commonly used at the end of chapters to ensure the reader continues.
Foreshadowing	When events in the future are hinted at.
Flashback	When an episode from earlier in the story or before the story began is recounted. This could be to explain a character's <b>backstory</b> , or it could show us an important plot point.
Flashforward	When the narrative fast forwards to a point in the future.
Framing device	When a story has another story around it, or 'framing' it.
In media res	When a story starts in the middle – often at the point of climax. The narrative may then return to the beginning of the story using <b>flashback</b> .
Red herring	A false clue which has the reader believing one thing, when in fact another is true.
Twist	When something completely unexpected and different to what has been hinted at, happens within a story.

# An Introduction to... Narrative Structure

## Narrative Structure Terms

Can you match these narrative terms to their definitions?

Term	Definition
1 Backstory	<b>A</b> When a story has another story around it, or 'framing' it.
2 Cliffhanger	<b>B</b> When an episode from earlier in the story or before the story began is recounted. This could be to explain a character's <b>backstory</b> , or it could show us an important plot point.
3 Foreshadowing	<b>C</b> When the narrative ends on a dramatic event. This doesn't mean the end of the narrative – just that it has paused. It is a device commonly used at the end of chapters to ensure the reader continues.
4 Flashback	<b>D</b> When events in the future are hinted at.
5 Flashforward	<b>E</b> When a story starts in the middle – often at the point of climax. The narrative may then return to the beginning of the story using <b>flashback</b> .
6 Framing device	<b>F</b> When the narrative reveals important information about a character's background, which happened before the narrative began.
7 In media res	<b>G</b> When something completely unexpected and different to what has been hinted at, happens within a story.
8 Red herring	<b>H</b> When the narrative fast forwards to a point in the future.
9 Twist	<b>I</b> false clue which has the reader believing one thing, when in fact another is true.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

Term	Definition
<b>1</b> Backstory	<b>F</b> When the narrative reveals important information about a character's background, which happened before the narrative began.
<b>2</b> Cliffhanger	<b>C</b> When the narrative ends on a dramatic event. This doesn't mean the end of the narrative – just that it has paused. It is a device commonly used at the end of chapters to ensure the reader continues.
<b>3</b> Foreshadowing	<b>D</b> When events in the future are hinted at.
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<b>5</b> Flashforward	<b>H</b> When the narrative fast forwards to a point in the future.
<b>6</b> Framing device	<b>A</b> When a story has another story around it, or 'framing' it.
<b>7</b> In media res	<b>E</b> When a story starts in the middle – often at the point of climax. The narrative may then return to the beginning of the story using <b>flashback</b> .
<b>8</b> Red herring	<b>I</b> A false clue which has the reader believing one thing, when in fact another is true.
<b>9</b> Twist	<b>G</b> When something completely unexpected and different to what has been hinted at, happens within a story.



## An Introduction to... Narrative Structure Teaching Ideas

### Learning Objective:

To understand a classic linear narrative structure and how this can be subverted.

### Success Criteria:

- To understand a linear narrative structure.
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- To explore key narrative techniques.

### Context

This lesson offers a simple introduction to narrative structure for students at either KS3 or KS4. The lesson introduces a classic linear narrative structure or arc and then explores ways this can be subverted for effect.

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## Starter

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### Story Time!

Students could start by telling each other a classic fairy tale or myth in just five sentences. They should try not to include specific names and instead use generic nouns. Can their partner guess the story they are telling?

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## Main Activities

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### Story Structures

You could now start a discussion about how easy it was to divide the story into five sentences. Could those different sentences be summarised – what were they each about? The PowerPoint has some pointers for ways to summarise the different stages of the story.

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### Narrative Structure

You could now introduce the classic narrative structure or arc. This is available on the PowerPoint.

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### Pause!

As a mini-plenary, ask students to consider what they have just learnt about the linear narrative structure. What are the potential problems with this form? Encourage students to think about predictability and boredom for the reader.

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### Non-Linear Narrative

You could now introduce the concept of narrative subversion. The PowerPoint has an explanation and there is also a **Narrative Structure Terms Worksheet** available in higher and lower ability versions.

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### Pick a Task!

Students have a choice between three, differentiated tasks to explore linear and non-linear narrative.

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## Plenary

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### What Is It?

The PowerPoint has five key terms studied in the lesson. Can students come up with definitions without consulting their notes? This could be done individually, or as a team game.