

Story Structure: Some Key Terms

Most stories consist of a few consistent parts or elements: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, and Falling Action, plus **Resolution** (how it all works out). We'll talk about these terms throughout the course, so let's get to know them!

Exposition

Writers can present exposition in many ways, including character monologues, dialogue, in-universe media (newspapers, letters, reports, journals, etc.), a protagonist's thoughts, or a narrator's explanation of past events.

Example #1: Star Wars (By George Lucas)

There are countless examples of exposition in many great movies and one of them, which comes across particularly well, is from Star Wars. The exposition in this movie is the opening title sequence, which gives information about the past events to the audience. The crawling text on the screen at the beginning of each movie in the series gives the audience every piece of information they need to understand the upcoming events in the film. The opening lines begin like this:

"A long time ago in a galaxy far away, far away..."

Example #2: The Three Little Bears (By Robert Southey)

An exposition is typically positioned at the beginning of a novel, movie, or other literary work, because the author wants the audience to be fully aware of the characters in the story. The famous children's story entitled *The Three Little Bears* applies this technique of exposition:

"Once upon a time, there were three bears. There was a Daddy Bear, who was very big, a Mama Bear, who was middle-sized, and a Baby Bear, who was very small. They all lived together in a little cottage in the middle of the woods. Their favorite breakfast was porridge. One morning, after they made their porridge, Daddy Bear said, 'Let's go for walk in the woods until it cools.' Mama Bear and Baby Bear liked the idea, so off they went. While they were away, a little girl named Goldilocks came walking through the forest and smelled the porridge..."

With the help of a single passage, the author of the story has given us an overview of the bear family, their residence, and information that sets the story in motion.

Rising Action

Rising action is one of the elements of plot, begins immediately after its exposition.

Definition: A story's exposition introduces background information about events, settings, characters, or other elements of a work to the audience or readers. The word comes from the Latin language, and its literal meaning is "a showing forth." Exposition is crucial to any story, for without it nothing makes sense.

Definition: *Rising action* in a plot is a series of relevant incidents that create suspense, interest and tension in a narrative. The rising action includes all decisions, characters' flaws and background circumstances that together create turns and twists leading to a climax. We find it in novels, plays and short stories.

Rising Action Examples

Example 1

The conflict begins in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* as Gandalf meets Bilbo and asks him to play the role of a burglar of dwarves' expedition to recover treasure of Thorin from Smaug. Rising action occurs as he agrees to live up and act as a burglar during this adventure. His heroism begins merely by shouting to wake up Gandalf, who rescues company from goblin, and then action slowly intensifies when he finds out the magic ring. Gradually, he overcomes difficulties by killing a big spider, and establishes his potentials as a hero and leader.

Example 2

In Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's novel, *Snow White and Seven Dwarfs*, the rising action occurs when magic mirror of Queen warns her that she is no more the fairest lady in the land, instead it is now Snow White. Then envious Queen orders her huntsman to take her stepdaughter Snow White away from the palace in the forest and secretly kill her. Fortunately, they cannot kill and lose her in the forest where seven tiny dwarfs find her. They bring her up in their home, however, action rises another time when mirror tells the Queen that Snow White is alive.

Function of Rising Action

The events of a rising action are generally very important, because the entire plot of a narrative depends upon these events for setting up the climax—a moment of ultimate excitement that eventually leads to a satisfactory resolution. For instance, an author writes a love story in which a moment comes when characters decide whether to stay together or break up—thus rising action sets a stage for this moment by building up dramatic situations or conflicts. It further adds a layer of complexity to the plot for developing characters and climax.

Climax

Climax is a structural part of a plot and is at times referred to as a crisis. It is a decisive moment or a turning point in a storyline at which the rising action turns around into a falling action. Thus, **a climax is the point at which a conflict or crisis reaches its peak** and demands a resolution or *denouement* (conclusion).

Definition: *Climax*, a Greek term meaning “ladder,” is that particular point in a narrative at which the conflict or tension hits the highest point.

In *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, for example, the story reaches its climax when Romeo challenges Tybalt to a duel after he (Tybalt) killed Romeo's best friend, Mercutio. They fight, and Romeo kills Tybalt. Romeo then realizes that he has killed his wife's cousin.

This event in the play is a climax because the audience wonders how Romeo can get out of this terrible situation. The tension is at its highest. Similarly, it qualifies as a climax because after this act all the prior conflicts start to be resolved and mysteries unfold themselves and thus the story moves toward its logical conclusion during the coming scenes.

Function of Climax

A climax, when used as a plot device, helps readers understand the significance of the rising action earlier to the point in the plot where the conflict reaches its peak. The Climax of the story makes readers mentally prepared for the resolution of the conflict. Hence, climax is important to the plot structure of a story.

Falling Action

Examples of Falling Action

Example #1

Falling action in Star Wars occurs when rebels and Luke Skywalker discover a vulnerable section in the Death Star of Vader. It is up to Luke Skywalker to destroy the space ship following several failed attempts. Vader virtually hits Luke's ship; however, Han Solo saves his ship by shooting at Vader. Then, Luke uses force and destroys Death Star against all odds, and saves the rebels. Yet the story does not end here. The audience then sees the return of Han and Luke to the rebels, who receive congratulations for making heroic efforts. Then the falling action takes place when these two characters win rewards and medals from Princess Leia for saving the day.

Example #2

The falling action of "Romeo and Juliet" begins following rising action and climax which is reached when the lovers are killed. Then the parents and Prince discover the bodies of two lovers, and they agree to put aside their animosity in the best interest of peace.

Function of Falling Action

Audience expects low ebb after every great tide in order to give themselves a feeling of relief. This happens with falling action of the story or the play. In fact, it is the desire of the audiences to see the fruits of the labor of a hero or protagonist that satisfy them. If this does not happen, the audience stays unsatisfied, and the story seems incomplete. Thus, falling action serves as a rewarding element in a story or movie. In addition, it is like a road from climax to resolution, and if the road is vacant, the story may end too abruptly.

We'll discuss all of these story parts—Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, and Falling Action, plus **Resolution** (how it all works out), throughout the course. Get to know them!

Definition: *Falling action* occurs right after the climax, when the main problem of the story resolves. it wraps up the narrative and resolves its loose ends