

Story & Drama
TUTORIALS

Storytelling

INTRODUCTION

PLOTS / CHARACTERS / DRAMA EFFECTS / NARRATIVE SETTINGS

Let's read and let's write

Be welcome in our Story&Drama collection which aims at developing your knowledge in **storytelling** and at providing you with **narrative** concepts and **creative** tools.

Writing a **story** is not simple, but with a bit of methodology based on the most successful artworks in various artforms, everybody is able to write a science-fiction **novel**, a comedy show, philosophical **comics**, an album of electro **songs**, a philosophical **music video**, a documentary **film**, and anything else in **fiction**.

So we wish you good reading and we also wish to hear all the great **stories** that you will tell the world, starting here!

Story&Drama

ISBN 978-2-36816-008-4

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What is storytelling?

The tools of storytelling

Storytelling is the theory, analysis and art of stories and of anything narrative in general.

As a **creative and analytic tool**, storytelling uses:

- **concepts** (like "plot", "character", "actantial role", "system of values", "goal", "motivation", "genre", "emotion", etc...)
- **text descriptions** (summaries of plots, portrait of characters, descriptions of actions, lists of themes...)
- **schemes** (like the **standard plot scheme** or the **set of characters** presented here),
- **methods** (developing a character into a set of characters, filling the gaps of a plot, building an architecture of plots, setting up the themes of a complex story...)
- and **medias** (to write, we use different **paper** formats, cards, various **softwares**, and sometimes visual medias (storyboard)).

What is storytelling?

Who uses storytelling and how to make progress?

Storytelling as a theory and practice is the skill of **teller**, whatever **art** and **media** they might have chosen to tell their stories, whether it be through movies, books TV shows, music, games, advertisements, speeches or even by political actions...

Every storyteller started from our **common skill to tell stories**. We can all make progress and learn telling better. Nothing warrants we are geniuses, but a bit of work warrants that our next stories will be told a more mastered way.

One progresses by 3 ways: theory, analysis and practice.

To help you learn the main concepts and tools of storytelling, we developed the **Story&Drama Tutorials** over 3 levels.

- As a complement, we offer **analyses of masterworks** in various arts.
- If you want help while conceiving or writing a story, we can provide **personalized services**.

Everybody tells

Why do we tell?

Telling stories is in human nature. We can all do it.

Why can we do it?

Probably because **stories are a way to store information** about what the world is and how it works, about what to do and what to avoid doing. It is a school of life, in which we record experiences that we only live in imagination.

As such, stories carry our **vision of the world** and the characters carry our **values** and stage **conflicts** between those visions of the world and values: who will win, good or evil, the Hero or his Antagonist?

Telling has consequences

A **story is not neutral** and its audience is not supposed to stay indifferent towards it. On the contrary, stories are used to have an influence over the world, to take action.

A story also delivers an engaged **message** and has an **impact** over its audience.

This **impact** can be for example:

- An **action** (like, changing one's consumer choices after having seen a campaign against a given product)
- A **belief** (like, homosexuality is acceptable and homophobia is not)
- An **emotion** (like, the various feelings we develop during a love story).

Whatever we tell, we have a purpose, an intention, a goal:

- Imagine that you are a married woman and suddenly your husband tells you of all of the romantic escapades he has been having outside of your marriage this year. Will you not react one way or another, and take action from what you feel after having heard those charming love stories?
- Imagine you are a journalist and you discover that a past well known criminal has now become the Prime Minister of your country. You have a moral dilemma, if your story is true; it is possible that the Prime Minister will dismiss it, however if it is false you will most certainly lose your job. Either way, this story has clear, concrete consequences.
- Imagine you are in love and you tell jokes to the person you are in love with. Here again, your jokes are supposed to stimulate a reaction of laughter which means that this person likes you. You tell jokes to get loved, they are not told "just for fun": the proof is that you do not tell them when you are not attracted.

The Plots

Definition

One main object in storytelling is obviously **the plot**.

A plot tells a series of actions centered on a character (that can be human or not, individual or collective).

A story is made of one or several plots. A joke is one plot, a movie can be many, and a TV series tells hundreds of plots.

How to write a standard plot

We can formalize ANY plot in one timeline in **3 "ACTS"**:

| PLOT | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| ACT I Introduction | ACT II Development | ACT III Conclusion |
| Beginning | Middle | End |

If we detail more, we can now tell or analyze ANY story through the following **13 steps**:

| PLOT | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------|---------|------|-----------------------|--------|-----------------|
| ACT I Introduction | | | ACT II Development | | | | ACT III Conclusion | | |
| Initial Situation | Catalyst + Goal | Dramatic QUESTION | Process | Node | Process | Node | Crisis | Climax | Dramatic ANSWER |

Advantage: if we can formalize **one** story like that, we can formalize **many**. So we are then able to build **a story with 3, 5, 20 plots and more** - without getting lost.

The plots we make can then be mixed into **narrative architectures** (see just later).

The characters

A plot tells what happens to a Hero

There is (nearly) always at least one character that we follow all along the plot. This is the main character. He, she, or it is very important.

Whereas it is just words or pictures or whatever else, **some great works make us feel like characters are real and even "more than real"**. How to do that? Some character's power is so strong, that some people in the audience will get very attached to them, praise them like idols, copy their lifestyle, repeat their famous lines, fall in love with them...

Dramatic and non-dramatic characters

Some characters are central, needed, **dramatic** (like a lover discussing in a cafe with his girlfriend) and have **dramatic properties**:

- **Goal** (and **sub-goals**)
- **Motivations**
- **Strengths** and **weaknesses**
- **Theme properties** (=flesh)

Some other characters are **not dramatic**, not necessary, they could be removed (like the neutral customers in the cafe in the previous situation). They do not need **dramatic properties**.

The characters

Here is an example of dramatic properties:

| Radiohead's music video "RABBIT IN YOUR HEADLIGHTS" | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| LONELY WALKER vs. CARS | | | |
| LONELY WALKER | | CARS | |
| Goal | Walk? Get out of the tunnel? | Goal | Pass by, cross the tunnel |
| Motivation | (Untold) | Motivation | (Untold) |
| Problem | Dangerous cars | Problem | Pedestrian in the way |
| + | - | + | - |
| Resistant Determined | Alone Vulnerable Crazy | Many Strong, solid | Weaker than flesh in the end!! |

The characters

A plot tells the **conflict** between a **MAIN CHARACTER** and his/her **ANTAGONIST**

This conflict is **fundamental** and **necessary**: if there's no opposition, there's no drama and no dramatic energy to play on!

The other characters are there to **get involved** in the main conflict, add their forces, play a role.

| | | |
|----------------|----|------------|
| HERO | VS | ENEMY |
| COLUMBO | VS | CRIMINAL |
| ROCKY | VS | CHAMPION |
| RAMBO | VS | SMALL TOWN |
| SPACESHIP TEAM | VS | ALIEN |

The characters

Hero and Antagonist have Helpers, Mentors and Skeptics

Our main characters have other dramatic characters to help, support or contradict them. We call them all "**actantial roles**": characters taking roles in the action.

We make the difference between **actantial roles** and **thematic roles** that carry the identity of the characters. The tutorial **Storytelling 2. Advanced** studies actantial and thematic roles in **Pulp Fiction** and in **Nip/Tuck**.

- **Helpers** are characters who perform actions in favor of their leader, either the Hero or the Antagonist.
- **Mentors** are characters who provide information and motivation to the Heroes or Enemies.
- **Skeptics** have the contrary role: to discourage, to contradict the motivations and goals of a **Hero** or an **Antagonist**.

The characters

Here is the typical **set of characters** as **actantial roles**:

| | | | |
|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| MENTOR | SKEPTIC | MENTOR | SKEPTIC |
| HERO | | ENEMY | |
| HELPER | HELPER | HELPER | HELPER |
| HELPER | HELPER | HELPER | HELPER |

And here is one example from THE GODFATHER:

| The Godfather, main plot | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| - | - | Barzini | - |
| VITO CORLEONE | | TATTAGLIA | |
| Sonny | Fredo | Sollozzo | Bruno Tattaglia |
| Michael | Tom Hagen | Police Captain | Tessio |
| Fredo/Carlo | Various killers | Fredo/Carlo (traitors) | Various killers |

Narrative architectures

Simple stories tell one unique plot

So they just have to be **written** and told.

- The video clip for Radiohead's song RABBIT IN YOUR HEADLIGHTS and the cartoon ROAD RUNNER are made of simple plots.

Complex stories tell several plots – from 2 to hundreds

So here the creative process is more complex.

The plots need to be **written**, then **mixed** or **structured**. Or one can first make a structure, then write the plots from it.

Anyway, complex stories necessarily involve several layers of composition: the structure of each plot and the overall plots structure.

- HAMLET : a few plots
- THE GODFATHER : around 27 plots
- PULP FICTION : around 10 plots
- THE WIRE : around 600 plots in 5 Seasons!
- FRIENDS : at least and in average 2 plots by episode - and the series counts 236 episodes along its 10 Seasons, so that is at least 500 plots.

Narrative architectures

When stories are **complex** and **made of many plots**, those plots are cut into pieces and then mixed together in a general **narrative architecture**.

To mix plots together we have to:

- Cut each plot into parts

Here we meet new problems: where to cut? what to tell, what to leave untold or implicit?

- Rebuild a general outline with those parts, so that each line, and the whole composition, is readable and efficient

Here we meet the problem of the parts matching together or not, in terms of realism, of articulated themes, of chronology...

There are several types of multi-plot structures

According to the function of each plot with the others, also according to whether there is a causality effect from one plot to another, and to whether some characters are shared in several different plots, we may find those structures:

- **Parallel** or **interlaced plots**
- **Factorial plots**
- **Crossed plots**
- **Included plots**
- **Series of plots**

Today, the **competition** is huge in all arts, so it appears preferable to write stories that are also interesting as structures. A smart structure gives an artwork a real advantage. Trust the audience: they prefer when it's good.

The structures mentioned above are among the most used in storytelling. A writer has to know how to use them.

Drama effects

Think smart, use tools and techniques

A few basic **principles** can rule the telling of the final story.

For example:

- Never say, always show! Do not declare it, prove it!
- Build dilemmas / paradoxical situations
- Use two actions rather than one - create a mini-plot action to support the main plot action.
- Manage the balance of forces between opposite teams

Distribute information among the characters and to the audience

It is one thing to **build stories with their plots and characters**, it is something else to **tell the final story from what we built**.

One main difference is that us, authors, have to know everything about the story, whereas we will not fully inform our audience and our characters, so as to stay able to make surprises and dramatic effects.

- Audience is informed, some characters are not
- Character is informed, audience is not
- Some characters are informed, some others are not

Make special drama effects

Some special, dramatic effects, can be added to nearly any plot. One has to know those effects...

- Wrong track
- Time counted / Time lock
- Nearly... but no!
- Repetition ...

Drama parameters

The final story involves **parameters** that the author can closely control, such as:

- The **time scale**: the duration of events, their rhythm, their density...
- The **chronologies**: the order of the telling, with some events told in flashback, flash-forward, or in parallel...
- The **space**: the plots happen in a series of places, and a story with several plots builds a world. This world can be structured as such.
- The **media**: we are frequently led to use/quote different medias in one work.
- The **genre**: it is often an advantage to stage a story in a well-known genre that the audience likes.
- The **logics**: a story can be rational or absurd or crazy or distorted. It can also work as a discourse, and there are tools to help elaborate such works.
- The **narrator** and **focus**: often, stories are told **by** someone **to** someone. For example, a story is told in a letter from one character to another, or it is told on the phone between 2 friends. A same action can be seen from many different points of view with different focuses.

All of those points are the object of **Storytelling 2.Advanced** and **Storytelling 3.Experts**.

See you soon

We hope this introduction to storytelling got you interested :-)

It is just a few basics, like starting the study of physics by the fact matter is made of molecules made of atoms.

The best moment is probably when storytelling escapes the normal laws of Newtonian then Einsteinian physics and becomes quantic! With some more knowledge, with some more experience, the storyteller can build stories that, like cathedrals or planes, challenge the usual rules of Mother Nature. Experts in universal rules, we can better find the special cases and weird exceptions that will make our work so special.

We wish you good luck in your next stories and if you want to make a bit of your artistic way in company of Story&Drama, you're welcome, colleague!

Story&Drama Services

You may need:

PROJECT COUNSELING / MONITORING

You have ideas, intentions, projects of stories to tell, but you lack experience and you seek for support.

➔ I can guide you.

SCRIPT-DOCTORING / SCRIPT ANALYSIS

You wrote a script... but you need to test it?

➔ I can help you analyze the strong and weak points of your project, and provide you tools and methods to check and improve what is wrong.

STORY DEVELOPMENT

You need stories for your works or your communication.

You know about the elements : audience, media, budget, meaning, emotion...

➔ I can write it for you according to your instructions.

PARTICULAR LESSONS / WORKSHOPS

You want to learn storytelling, to develop your knowledge in narrative art.

➔ I am there to teach you everything I know about storytelling.

Please visit the Story&Drama's [SERVICES](#) webpage to know more about the fees and conditions, then get in touch!

The Story&Drama Collection

Tutorials

Learn storytelling in those progressive tutorials. The two first ones are for free!

Discover narrative tools in theory and practice: plots and composition, characters, drama effects, genres, media, registers, chronologies, spaces, drama tension, value systems, psychology...

- [STORYTELLING - INTRODUCTION](#)
- [STORYTELLING - WORKING METHOD](#)
- [STORYTELLING 1 - BEGINNER](#)
- [STORYTELLING 2 - ADVANCED](#)
- [STORYTELLING 3 - EXPERT](#)

Analyzes

Observe narration masters at work in those Analyzes of famous art-works:

Cinema

- [THE GODFATHER](#)
- [PULP FICTION](#)

TV Series

- [GAME OF THRONES](#)

Music

- [SONGWRITING](#)
- [MUSIC VIDEOS](#)

Literature and theater

- [THE LITTLE PRINCE](#)

Comics

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