

The How to Build Plot Arcs Worksheet



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Intro

One listener asked the following very good question:

A lot of the discussion seems to focus on what is the minimum you need to include in a scene, going over PACTS etc. which is great. (I love the PACTS and "what changes" questions, it's the best scene-level writing guidance I've ever read/heard.)

But it seems to me that although no particular scene needs more than those basics, when you are writing a book there are other larger-than-scene-level conflicts that you have to cover somewhere, and these inevitably have to end up in scenes. I think sometimes this is where writers (including myself) go astray, maybe including too much of this stuff in a scene that is about something else?

First... yep. Many writers succumb to the red-faced howling of *Infodump's* first cousin, *Plot Exposition*, and screw up their books because of him.

The good news is, you don't have to be one of them.

The trick in not killing any scene's momentum is to realize that every "larger than scene" conflict still has to be written into scenes — and then to realize that the answer to the question is in the word SCENES.

Plural.

The fix to building good plot arcs instead of awful Exposition is truly simple, and really fun. Print out your worksheets, [then write through the episode with us](#).

Onward.

Now identify each active character in your story, with the bare minimum of your Protagonist and Antagonist, and with any friends and enemies, and if needed, Born-to-Dies (BTD), and potentially interesting So-the-Room-Isn't-Empties (STRIE). You may need more than one sheet.

Name _____

Role _____

Name _____

Role _____

Name _____

Role _____

Name _____

Role _____

Name _____

Role _____

Name _____

Role _____

Now, break your Big Conflict down into [Showable Pieces](#), as we [demonstrate in the podcast](#). You may need to print more sheets.

*

Single_action _____

Active_character _____

Change _____

Consequence _____

*

Single_action _____

Active_character _____

Change _____

Consequence _____

Big Conflict Dissection, continued. Be sure to spread the actions around among different characters.

*

Single_action _____

Active_character _____

Change _____

Consequence _____

*

Single_action _____

Active_character _____

Change _____

Consequence _____

Big Conflict Dissection, continued. Be sure to spread the actions around among different characters.

*

Single_action _____

Active_character _____

Change _____

Consequence _____

*

Single_action _____

Active_character _____

Change _____

Consequence _____

Finally, answer the following questions.

Is there any Showable Piece of your big conflict that would be more exciting or more interesting if given to a different character, and if so, who, and why?

Is there any Showable Piece of your big conflict that could be kept secret, and brought forward as a surprise twist later? If so, what, and how?

Is there any Showable Piece of your big conflict that feels weak or uninteresting? If so, what would make it a compelling scene element?

Is there any Showable Piece of your big conflict that feels cramped? If so, how can you break it into smaller pieces spread through more scenes?
