

Classical Narrative Structure

The Classical Narrative Structure is called this because it is the way most movies are made in Hollywood. It's the most common structure of storytelling in mainstream films. It's based on a three-act format that organizes story in the following way:

Act I - The Setup

Here, we are introduced to the main characters in the story, their goals, and the obstacles they are likely to face to achieve their objectives. The main conflict in the story is introduced, as well as the major antagonist (the villain) who will stand in the way of the protagonist's (the hero's) objectives.

We can call Act I in a movie the *Hook*. It sets up the story so that the film engages the attention of the audience and suggests the story's likely development. Act I generally takes up about one-quarter of the film's total length.

Act II - The Development

Here, plot complications are added to the story. An increasing sense of urgency is created when the main characters encounter obstacles that stand in the way of their journey. The second act generally occupies the middle two-quarters of the film and it often includes a false resolution to the main conflict set up in Act I. Once the false resolution has been encountered, the action in the movie generally points inevitably toward a necessary climax.

Throughout Act II, *Cause-Effect Relationships* propel the main characters along. Cause-effect relationships involve actions that force a reaction on the part of some character, leading to a new action and reaction and so on.

Act III - The Resolution

In the final segment of the film, the results of the story's main conflict come to dramatic confrontation. This is called the *Climax*. It is the point where key struggles are waged and an eventual victor is determined. In Hollywood films, needless to say, the eventual victor is usually our hero.

Following the climax, *Closure* is introduced into the story, which simply means that all the major conflicts, issue, or ideas in the story are resolved. The so-called "Hollywood ending" is the most popular kind of closure in the classical narrative structure. Films with this kind of conclusion usually close with a sense that the protagonists in the film live happily ever after.

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