

THE IN A HURRY SERIES

Storytelling *in a Hurry*

Structure that holds attention

Max Brocklesby

BOOKSINAHURRY.COM

Contents

The Whole Thing in One Page 4

Why You Should Care 5

The Core Ideas 7

How It Actually Works 21

What People Get Wrong 31

Use It 35

Terms 40

Go Deeper 45

Notes and Sources 47

Bibliography 56

The Whole Thing in One Page

The familiar public image of story structure is a skeleton: three acts, five acts, a hero's journey, a row of beats waiting to be filled. These diagrams can help with particular kinds of work. None explains storytelling as a whole. A joke, a witness account, an oral epic, a tragedy whose ending everyone knows, a fragmented film and a quiet family story can hold attention while refusing the same outline.

A story is a selection of consequential difference arranged across time. Something was one way, then it became another, and a teller invites an audience to track why the change matters. Reality offers more events than anyone can absorb. Structure chooses a line through them, decides who can see it, controls when information arrives, enlarges some moments, compresses others and stops where the selected difference becomes readable.

Attention therefore needs something to track, rather than one mandatory question. The audience may await an outcome, reconstruct a cause, judge a choice, recognise a pattern, anticipate a familiar return or listen for how a known event will be performed. Suspense asks what may happen. Curiosity asks what produced the present state. Surprise overturns a model. Dramatic irony makes us wait while a character acts without knowledge we possess. Familiarity can hold attention too, because repetition creates a contract and performance creates variation.

Each major part must alter the field. One event may cause another, close an option, transfer knowledge, change a relationship or recast what came before. Direct causality is powerful, but contrast, accumulation, recurrence and juxtaposition can also organise a story. The test is whether the audience's model changes. Mere motion leaves it where it was.

Stakes need a point of attachment. A person is common, not compulsory. Consequence can land on a family, community, place, practice, institution, animal or value. Scale does not create care by itself. A planet can explode without consequence if it was only scenery; a missing recipe can carry a life

if it is the last material link to someone dead.

Viewpoint allocates knowledge, and the telling situation matters. Who speaks, to whom, with what authority, in what medium and under what obligations? An oral performer can read a room and alter pace. A novelist can enter thought and compress decades. Film can join images that imply a relation. Interactive work can let a participant change some later possibilities. Factual tellers possess the same controls with stricter duties: sequence is not proof of cause, reconstruction is not observation, and uncertainty must remain visible when it changes responsibility.

Pace is the distribution of significance. Scene expands, summary compresses, omission makes the audience cross a gap, and repetition can prepare either participation or rupture. An ending judges the opening selection. It may settle a question, transform it or give uncertainty a clear shape. Its job is to show what state now exists and why this was the change worth telling.

Structure holds attention when the audience keeps revising an honest model of what matters.

That is the book.

Why You Should Care

The first image of Christopher Nolan's *Memento* shows a Polaroid photograph losing its picture while a killing runs backwards. The film then makes its audience perform the work its central character cannot: hold a changing account of what has happened, test each piece of evidence and decide which explanation deserves trust. Its major colour sequence moves backwards through the plot while a black-and-white sequence moves forwards. The structure is not decoration around the story. It creates the experience.

Most stories use quieter machinery, but the principle reaches ordinary life. You tell stories when you explain why a customer left, report what went wrong in a project, describe a first date, present an investigation, teach a

child or answer the question, "How was your day?" The facts may remain the same while their arrangement changes what another person notices, remembers and believes caused what. Storytelling is one of the main ways thought becomes transmissible, and one of the easiest ways thought becomes distorted.

The practical gain is attention. Weak accounts rarely fail because nothing happened. They fail because the teller has not chosen which difference deserves the listener's effort. The account starts before relevance, keeps every detour, supplies background before a reason to need it and reaches the consequence after the audience has stopped expecting one. Structure removes unnecessary labour. It establishes what to track and makes each alteration legible without announcing the mechanism.

This matters in fiction because attention is not speed. A chase can be dull when its result changes nothing. A long meal can be tense when each remark narrows a relationship's future. Stakes are not measured in explosions. They are measured by the distance between possible outcomes and by the audience's investment in whatever must live with them. Once that is clear, quiet stories stop looking structureless and noisy stories stop receiving credit for volume.

It also explains why a known ending can remain gripping. Sophocles did not need to conceal the broad result from audiences familiar with the Oedipus myth. The pressure came from watching a capable ruler investigate a pollution in his city while moving towards knowledge many spectators could anticipate. Foreknowledge changed the form of attention rather than abolishing it.

It matters in speech and performance because a story is an event between people. A live teller hears laughter, sees confusion and adjusts emphasis, repetition or pace. Albert Lord's work with South Slavic epic singers showed performers drawing on inherited formulas and episodes while composing long songs in performance rather than reciting a fixed written text. That finding concerns a particular tradition, not every oral form, but it breaks a common assumption: structure need not be a silent plan completed before

delivery. It can be negotiated with memory, convention and listeners as the telling unfolds.

It matters in factual work because selection can illuminate or deceive. Beginning a history with a disaster can make every earlier decision look like a step towards it. Cutting between two events can suggest a causal link the evidence does not establish. Giving one person a clean motive can conceal institutions, chance and conflicting testimony. Narrative persuasion research finds that stories can influence beliefs, attitudes and behaviour under studied conditions, while results vary by message, audience, comparison and outcome. A vivid sequence buys attention. It does not buy proof.

By the end of this hour, you should be able to find the change inside a topic and decide what the audience must track. You should be able to separate event order from telling order, diagnose a repetitive middle, attach stakes without inflating scale, choose among scene, summary and omission, and end by consequence rather than exhaustion. You should also recognise when a polished narrative hides uncertainty or makes sequence look like cause.

The reward is control over the audience's changing model, and honesty about the control you are using.

The Core Ideas

A Story Selects a Difference

Reality does not arrive edited. At any moment, countless events occur at different scales, most of them unrelated to the account someone wants to give. A story begins by refusing almost all of this. It chooses a difference and grants that difference a boundary. Before it, one arrangement of knowledge, possibility or value held. Afterwards, another held. Structure starts with the claim that this alteration deserves an audience.

The Odyssey does not begin with the departure for Troy or with the first day of Odysseus's wandering. It opens after years of absence, while his

household is being consumed by men who assume he will not return. Much of the earlier journey arrives later through his own account. The poem's vast event history remains available, but the telling selects a present pressure: what prolonged absence has done to home, identity and rule, and whether return can restore any of them.

Selection decides which events count, where the account enters, whose experience supplies the centre and which background must wait. This is why the question "What is it about?" often produces a topic, while "What becomes different?" begins to produce a story. A topic may be a school, a friendship or an election. A story finds the alteration inside it: a marking system rewards the wrong skill, two friends discover that they remember a promise differently, or a result changes which coalition can govern.

Aristotle's *Poetics* gives action priority in tragedy because tragedy represents people doing things whose arrangement produces consequence. His analysis belongs to Greek drama and epic, not to every later form. Its durable correction is narrower. A catalogue of traits does not yet create structure. A proud ruler, a loyal daughter and a frightened witness are possibilities until a decision or discovery makes those qualities operate under pressure.

The distinction between chronology and plot is often taught through E. M. Forster's royal deaths. In paraphrase, one royal death followed by another supplies sequence; grief linking the two supplies plot. The example is useful, but direct cause cannot own the entire field. A storyteller may conceal a cause and build curiosity. A memoir may join two episodes because their resemblance appears only in retrospect. A ritual narrative may repeat a known sequence because the performance renews a relation rather than reveals an outcome. A witness may keep strict chronology because responsibility depends on what could have been known at each moment.

Some stories minimise outward action. A person waits, observes, remembers or fails to act. The difference may lie in knowledge, expectation, relationship, status or interpretation. "Nothing happens" often means no large physical event occurred. If the audience's model of the situation

changes, narrative movement has occurred.

Selection creates responsibility in factual work. Beginning a company's history with a founder's idea can erase collaborators, public research, inherited capital and failed predecessors. Repeating one family remark as the cause of a separation can make years of strain disappear. The selected hinge organises explanation, and what is omitted may start to look irrelevant.

The first diagnostic is therefore a before-and-after sentence. Before this event, what was possible, known, believed or valued? Afterwards, what had altered? The strongest story does not contain the greatest conceivable change. It contains a difference whose consequence an audience can follow.

Attention Needs Something to Track

Attention is a repeated allocation. An audience gives the next moment time because it expects that moment to change something it is tracking. In a detective story, the object may be an explicit question: who committed the crime? Elsewhere it may be a relationship, a pattern, a moral judgement, a promised return, the quality of a performance or the changing meaning of an event whose outcome is already known.

The frame of *One Thousand and One Nights* makes continuation a matter of life. Shahrazad tells stories to postpone her execution, and stories open inside other stories until telling itself carries pressure. The collection grew across languages and centuries, so no single nightly-cliffhanger formula explains it. Its frame still exposes a basic contract. An audience continues when stopping would abandon something made consequential by the telling.

Suspense, curiosity and surprise describe three useful forms of tracking. Suspense concerns an uncertain future, curiosity a concealed past or cause, and surprise an overturned model. Researchers have shown how discourse order can encourage these responses, mainly in bounded written materials rather than every kind of telling. The categories overlap, but they

clarify the difference between what happened and when the audience learns it.

Suspense does not require ignorance of the final result. Readers return to tragedies, and historical narratives concern outcomes already printed in memory. A film about the *Titanic* cannot make the ship's survival the honest question. It can make viewers track which warnings were understood, what choices narrowed escape, who formed attachments under time pressure and what the known disaster cost particular lives. Foreknowledge changes the object of attention from whether to how, when, why or at whose expense.

Curiosity reverses the pressure. The result appears first and the audience reconstructs its production. A friendship has ended, a city stands empty or a scientific result has been withdrawn. Each disclosure should do more than add fact. It should strengthen one explanation, weaken another, expose a missing premise or reveal that the original question was badly framed.

Surprise is brief, so its value depends on the altered model that follows. A disclosure succeeds when the prior reading was reasonable and the revised reading explains more. Concealing information that the chosen viewpoint should naturally have supplied creates a trick against the audience, not a revelation within the story.

Tracking can also rely on familiarity. Repetition in folktale, song, ceremony and oral performance may let listeners anticipate a return, join a refrain or judge a variation. The question is not always "What happens next?" It can be "How will this telling arrive at what we share?" Predictability and attention are therefore not opposites. A stable pattern can make a small deviation visible.

A live teller can revise the contract while speaking. Laughter may permit expansion; confusion may demand orientation; impatience may shorten a repeated passage. Written and recorded forms cannot read the room in the same way, so they must predict more of the audience's needs in advance.

Too many equal objects scatter attention. A long work can carry several

lines when their relation remains clear; a short account usually needs one governing object and perhaps a subordinate line. The teller should know what the audience is tracking, even when no character can name it. Structure weakens when every detail asks for equal weight.

The tracked object may transform. A story that begins by asking which employee made an error may reveal a system designed so that someone eventually had to. That shift earns trust when the first question leads honestly to the second. A story breaks its contract when it changes the task only because the promised answer proved inconvenient.

Each Part Must Alter the Field

"And then" records succession. Structure asks what each event did to the circumstances in which the next occurs. A missed call prevents a warning, which changes a decision and closes an option. Later action inherits the closure. The audience does not receive a row of happenings; it watches the field of possibility being rewritten.

Causality is the strongest binder because it lets earlier events remain active. If one choice makes another more likely, and the second raises the cost of retreat, the middle does not need a fresh excitement every few pages. Pressure accumulates from established conditions. Comedy often works this way: concealing one embarrassment requires a larger concealment and creates a witness who must now be managed. Explanation can work similarly when one engineering constraint produces an adaptation with a different weakness.

Real causes are often less tidy than stories. Financial crises, wars, institutional failures and scientific discoveries emerge from interacting conditions, feedback and decisions made with incomplete knowledge. A biography that makes every adult action the result of one childhood wound may feel coherent while exceeding the evidence. Narrative connection can propose a cause. It cannot establish one merely by arranging events in a persuasive line.

Direct cause is not the only way to alter the field. Contrast changes

interpretation. Repetition can show deterioration, endurance or renewal. Parallel stories reveal patterns no participant sees; frames and juxtapositions alter how material is understood; accumulation makes scale perceptible without one clean chain. Each major part need not cause the next, but it should change circumstances, options, knowledge, relation or interpretation.

Contingency gives decisions weight. An outcome feels consequential when another path existed, appeared to exist or was closed by an earlier move. This does not require theatrical crossroads. It may be enough to show the warning ignored, the rule that prevented delay, the alliance no longer available or the information that arrived one hour too late. Once a possibility disappears, the story gains a history that cannot be reset without cost.

A useful beat performs a clear operation. It may transfer knowledge, revise a relationship, alter a price, close an option or change what an earlier event means. The operation can be quiet. Noticing that a colleague has stopped correcting a familiar error changes the available explanations even when nothing outward follows. Quiet is compatible with movement; conceptual stasis is not.

The middle of a story often fails because events repeat without changing their function. A character makes three similar attempts and fails in the same way. An investigation interviews six people who offer interchangeable denials. A presentation supplies five examples after the claim is secure. Repetition earns its place when the pattern gathers consequence, when the failure teaches something, when the cost accumulates or when the expected return is deliberately broken.

This principle also explains why spectacle can feel empty. A second explosion larger than the first may leave the field unchanged. A single sentence can transform it if an apology removes one future and creates another. Structural size is measured by altered possibility, not by noise.

Endings depend on the same discipline. A final success produced by a skill, ally or fact introduced at the last moment has not grown from the story's

field. Chance belongs because it belongs in life, but a lucky rescue can cancel the meaning of earlier choices. Resolution should arise from visible conditions even when the exact result surprises.

After every major unit, ask four questions. What can happen now that could not happen before? What can no longer happen? Who knows something new? What has changed value? If every answer remains the same, the audience is being asked to spend time without receiving a changed model.

Stakes Need a Point of Attachment

An event becomes a stake when it alters a life, relationship, duty, place, practice or possibility. Characters often carry stakes because people can want, fear, choose and remember. They are not compulsory. Consequence can organise around a household, community, institution, landscape, species, sacred object or inherited obligation. What matters is that change lands somewhere the audience can model.

The sinking of a ship is a large event. Size alone does not tell an audience what to feel. Attention sharpens when the event reaches a particular deck, separates a family, changes which message an operator sends or forces crew to work inside rules that no longer fit the danger. Such attachments do not replace the wider disaster. They give scale a route into human understanding.

Desire supplies direction. A person wants to arrive, conceal, repair, protect, escape or remain unchanged. The desire need not be admirable, conscious or stable. It gives the audience a forecast against which events can be measured. A story can also distribute desire. A town wants jobs and clean water; different residents rank those goods differently. The collective has no single mind, yet its conflict of interests can still organise stakes.

Constraint gives the desire shape. Unlimited power empties many decisions because every option remains open. A deadline, law, bodily limit, promise, social role, lack of knowledge or competing duty narrows the field. Strong constraints reveal what someone or some group will trade. A leader who says safety comes first becomes legible when maintaining that claim delays

the result everyone else wants.

Choice exposes value more cleanly than description. Calling someone brave makes a claim. Showing what they do while afraid supplies evidence, though motive and consequence still matter. Silence may protect a confidence or preserve a harmful arrangement. The same outward act changes meaning according to what the actor and audience know.

The old contest between plot and character therefore misleads. Plot is changing conditions meeting agents capable of response; character becomes legible through that response. A sequence feels mechanical when nobody inside it alters the path, while a portrait feels inert when traits accumulate without consequence. Structure joins pressure to response and lets each change the other.

Identification is useful, not compulsory. Audiences can attend closely to people they dislike, distrust or cannot resemble. Interest may come from judgement, prediction, fascination or fear. Demanding a likeable protagonist often produces agreeable figures with little capacity to disturb the story. The stronger requirement is intelligibility: enough access to form and revise a model of action.

Some traditions and situations place the teller's relation to the story above individual desire. Jo-ann Archibald's account of Indigenous storywork, developed through work with Stó:lō and Coast Salish Elders and storytellers, stresses respect, responsibility, reverence and reciprocity. That framework should not be turned into a claim about all Indigenous peoples. It supplies a needed correction to commercial craft language. A story can be carried under obligations to community, knowledge and listener that are not captured by asking what one protagonist wants.

Stakes are relational, not scalar. Large events need concrete attachment. Small events need no apology when they expose a value clearly. A handwritten recipe may carry more consequence than an anonymous catastrophe when it is the remaining physical trace of a person who has died.

Ask who or what must now exist differently. If nobody's options, knowledge, relation, status or self-understanding changes, the event may be spectacle. A specific answer gives consequence somewhere to land.

Viewpoint Allocates Knowledge

Events have one order in the represented world and may reach an audience in another. Russian formalists contrasted *fabula*, the reconstructed events, with *syuzhet*, their arrangement. Chatman distinguished story from discourse; Genette separated order, duration and frequency. These schemes differ, but share a practical fact: a teller controls access, and access determines what the audience can infer.

Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* does more than repeat one incident. Testimony from people implicated in a killing and assault produces incompatible versions whose differences concern honour, shame, agency and self-presentation. The event cannot be recovered by treating one account as a neutral camera. Each version changes the audience's model of the speaker and of what testimony can do. Repetition becomes structure because perspective alters the meaning of the repeated material.

Memento uses order differently. Its principal colour scenes run backwards through the plot, so the audience enters each sequence without the immediate cause that produced it. A second sequence moves forwards and eventually meets the first. The arrangement does not copy the protagonist's condition in a clinical sense. It makes ordinary causal orientation difficult enough for viewers to share his dependence on notes, photographs and persuasive fragments.

Point of view is the channel through which this allocation occurs. First person can provide intimacy while withholding what the narrator cannot know, admit or understand. Third person can stay close to one consciousness or move among several. Film and theatre let an audience notice what a character misses. Audio can qualify a confident voice through background sound, while interactive work can limit information by route or action.

The teller and the viewpoint are not always the same. *The Odyssey* contains an external poetic narration, speeches by many figures and a long account in which Odysseus becomes the teller of his own wanderings to a particular audience whose help he needs. What he tells, when he identifies himself and how listeners respond belong to the action. A story is therefore shaped by who speaks, who is addressed and what the telling is trying to accomplish within its situation.

A narratee may be visible, as when one character tells another, or only implied by the form. Live performance makes the relation physical. The teller can judge whether listeners recognise a formula, need a name repeated or are ready for delay. A printed text fixes the sequence before any particular reader arrives, though it can still construct an imagined listener through tone, explanation and withheld knowledge.

Dramatic irony gives the audience knowledge denied to a character and makes it wait for ignorance to meet consequence. Mystery often makes the audience share or trail an investigator's ignorance. Curiosity reveals an outcome while concealing its production; surprise withholds a fact; unreliable narration creates friction between an account and the evidence available against it.

Withholding is structural, not permission to become vague. The audience needs enough material to form a model and enough absence to revise it. Conceal too little and no live inference remains; conceal too much and prediction becomes arbitrary. A locked box matters when the audience knows who wants it, why it resists opening and what may follow. Without those relations, it is furniture.

Information order carries ethical risk. Moving an interview pause after a different question can manufacture hesitation. Juxtaposing unrelated images can imply hypocrisy or cause. Beginning a history with categories invented by the eventual victor can make those categories appear inevitable. Factual tellers should ask not merely what makes the sequence compelling, but what a reasonable audience will infer from the allocation of knowledge and whether the evidence earns that inference.

Chronology is often clearest. Nonlinearity earns its cost when another order deepens consequence, reveals perspective or times discovery better. Ask what the audience should know now, from whom, and under what honest limitation.

Pace Distributes Significance

Pacing is often confused with speed. A fast story can feel slow when its events are interchangeable. A slow story can hold attention when each pause changes expectation or interpretation. Pace concerns the distribution of significance across time: how long a moment lasts, where information arrives, when a pattern repeats and how much space the audience receives to absorb a change.

Scene expands. It gives action enough continuity for perception, decision and response to occur before the audience. Summary compresses. It can move across days or decades, grouping events by pattern and consequence. Neither mode is morally better. A story made entirely of scene gives every movement equal weight. A story made entirely of summary may explain change without allowing any decisive moment to happen in experienced time.

The shift between them is one of the teller's strongest signals. Months of failed applications can be compressed until one interview differs. Years of a marriage can pass in a paragraph before one breakfast receives four pages. Expansion tells the audience that the pattern is changing here. If every breakfast receives four pages, the signal disappears unless repetition itself is the subject.

Duration is only one control. Frequency matters too. An event may happen once and be narrated several times, as in conflicting testimony. A routine may happen hundreds of times and be narrated once, then break into scene when deviation matters. Omission makes the audience cross a gap. A pause can increase pressure, permit reflection or expose discomfort. Clock time and narrative time answer to different measures.

Oral performance makes pace visible as an activity rather than a property of

a fixed text. In the 1930s, Milman Parry and Albert Lord recorded South Slavic epic singers, including Avdo Međedović, who could compose songs of enormous length in performance by drawing on inherited formulas, themes and episode patterns. The finding concerns a particular epic tradition. Its wider lesson is safer: repetition and formula can support memory, variation and shared expectation rather than signal mechanical copying.

Ruth Finnegan's work on oral literature across diverse African settings similarly insists that words on a page cannot preserve the full event. Voice, gesture, music, audience response, occasion and social role can determine the force of a narrative. No single African oral form stands for a continent, but the evidence corrects a text-bound account of structure. Pace can be negotiated between performer and listeners while the story is occurring.

A beat is the smallest useful turn in attention. It may be an answer withheld, an option lost, a relationship reclassified or evidence that rules out an attractive cause. Beats need not be equal in length. Their work is to prevent conceptual stasis. Delay becomes development when each postponement changes the route, cost or interpretation. Five locked doors are dull if they repeat one obstacle. They become structure if each door alters what the seeker knows or can still do.

Medium changes the available rhythm. Prose can suspend action while thought moves. Film can cut between spaces and compress years in seconds. Theatre directs attention through bodies, entrances, silence and shared duration. Audio can let breath, room tone or an off-microphone sound perform work the page must describe. Interactive work may let the participant determine traversal time while the designed system governs when consequences become available.

Pressure also needs release. After a revelation, the audience must update its model. After violence, a quiet consequence may carry more weight than immediate escalation. After dense explanation, concrete action can restore orientation. Release is where meaning catches up with event.

The practical test is not whether the story is moving quickly. Ask whether the audience has been waiting in the same way for too long. If circumstances, options, knowledge and interpretation remain unchanged, pace has stalled however much activity fills the surface.

The Ending Judges the Selection

An ending is the final major act of selection. The world continues, but the telling stops when the chosen difference can be judged. A case is decided, a person leaves, a truth becomes unavoidable, a ritual returns the group to ordinary time, or the audience understands why no clean settlement is available. Ending at the largest event is optional. Ending where consequence becomes readable is the stronger rule.

The opening creates an attention contract. It presents a condition, disturbance, voice or question and signals what kind of significance the story will reward. The ending pays that contract, changes its terms or exposes its limit. A narrative that begins with a disappearance cannot end on an unrelated career triumph unless the search has revealed why the career was the deeper subject. Surprise may revise the promise. It cannot behave as though no promise existed.

Closure has degrees. A detective story may identify the culprit while leaving grief unresolved. A romance may settle whether two people remain together while leaving their future conduct open. A historical account can explain why one decision mattered without pretending the period ended. Closure means the central tracked object has reached an adequate state, not that every possible question has vanished.

Recognition and reversal often concentrate this work. Aristotle used the terms for changes in knowledge and action within tragedy. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, investigation turns the ruler who seeks the source of his city's pollution into the man forced to recognise his own place within it. The ending does not add an arbitrary last fact. It changes the value of the inquiry, the authority from which it began and the audience's understanding of every confident step.

A twist is one possible device for such repricing. It asks the audience to reinterpret prior evidence. The test is double. Before disclosure, the first reading must have been reasonable. Afterwards, the revised reading should account for more of what was shown. A twist that works by hiding information the viewpoint would naturally disclose is an ambush by the teller. A twist that changes nothing beyond the gasp is detachable decoration.

Open endings can be complete. A person chooses to enter a room, and the story ends before the conversation. The external future remains unknown, but the decision prepared by the narrative has occurred. Ambiguity works when alternatives are sharply defined and evidence supports more than one. Vagueness leaves the audience unsure what the alternatives were or why the work stopped.

A coda can show residue: the scar, custom, absence, rule or altered routine remaining after the decisive turn. In conversational narrative, it may return teller and listeners to the present and explain why the event is being told now. Codas weaken endings when they continue settling drawers after the main consequence has landed.

Factual endings require restraint because history supplies no final frame. An investigation may leave uncertain causes. A policy produces effects at different times and for different groups. A life ends with unfinished work and disputed memory. The honest ending states what changed, what remained and which consequence continues. It does not manufacture redemption because readers expect uplift, or doom because tragedy feels weightier.

The ending therefore tests the entire design. If it cannot grow from earlier conditions, the middle failed to prepare it. If it resolves a question nobody cared about, the opening selected badly. If it leaves no residue, the stakes may have been announced rather than experienced.

Return to the first difference. Before it, one arrangement of knowledge, possibility and value held. After it, another holds. The ending reveals whether this was the change worth selecting and gives the opening its final

meaning.

How It Actually Works

Find the altered state

In an illustrative case invented for this section, an engineer closes a city bridge at 4.12 on a Friday afternoon after discovering that inspection data has been altered. Traffic gathers, a hospital route is cut and senior managers demand that she reopen it before anyone has confirmed whether the structure is unsafe. The subject is a bridge closure. The story lies in the difference between two states: before the discovery, the bridge carried ordinary trust; afterwards, every decision carried risk.

Start by writing that alteration without drama. What was possible, known, assumed or valued before? What is possible, known, assumed or valued after? The answer supplies the structural boundary. Material that does not help the audience understand the transition may still be interesting, but it is competing for the same hour.

The altered state can be external or internal. A vote changes a law. A diagnosis changes a person's forecast. A performance changes how a community remembers an old tale. A witness changes what an investigator believes. When outward circumstances remain stable, altered interpretation may carry the story, provided the audience can see what the new understanding permits or forbids.

Define the telling situation

Before choosing an opening, decide who is telling, to whom and why now. The bridge engineer's private account to her partner would not select the same material as her evidence to an inquiry, a journalist's reconstruction or a manager's attempt to defend the organisation. The event history overlaps. The authority, obligation and expected knowledge of the audience do not.

This question prevents voice from becoming decoration. A teller inside the events has limited access and a stake in how they are understood. An

external narrator may range more widely but still selects a centre and language. A live performer can respond to listeners. A recorded work must anticipate confusion, resistance and prior knowledge before any particular audience arrives.

Factual tellers should define their evidential position. Which parts were observed, recorded, reconstructed from documents, reported by participants or inferred? A first-person account may be honest and incomplete. An omniscient tone does not create omniscient evidence. The audience needs to know the limits when those limits change blame or cause.

Purpose changes what counts as relevant and complete. Testimony may need strict chronology and explicit uncertainty because responsibility turns on what was known when. Memorial telling may revisit known events because naming and shared recognition are part of the act. A ceremonial narrative may preserve an inherited sequence whose repetition carries authority. A comic anecdote can compress context because the listeners already share it. A campaign film may seek assent, which increases the need to distinguish emotional sequence from evidence. None of these purposes removes structure. Each changes the teller's obligations, the audience's expectations and the point at which the telling has done enough to stop.

Choose what the audience will track

Now state what makes continuation worthwhile. In the bridge case, "Is the bridge unsafe?" creates one line. "Who altered the data?" creates another. "Will the engineer hold the closure under pressure?" creates a third. A full account may carry all three, but one should govern each stretch. If every question receives equal weight from the first paragraph, attention divides before any relation among them is clear.

The tracked object need not be a mystery. It may be the cost of an already known decision, the change in a relationship, the performance of a familiar sequence or the accumulation of evidence against an accepted explanation. Write the audience's live expectation in plain language. Then write what the

audience must know to form it and what must remain unsettled.

Do not confuse vagueness with openness. "Something is wrong" can carry a few seconds. Durable attention requires a field of plausible meanings. The engineer has found altered figures, knows who had access and fears a structural defect. The audience can now predict, judge and revise. Without such footholds, withholding produces fog.

Enter at the first useful break

Chronology begins wherever the event record begins. A story begins where the audience first needs to notice a difference. The bridge account might open at 4.12, when the closure order is issued, then return to the altered spreadsheet. It might open months later at an inquiry, making the cause a matter of curiosity. It might begin with a driver encountering an empty road, making institutional decisions arrive through consequence.

Late entry saves orientation only when the omitted past can be supplied at the moment it becomes useful. Beginning with an alarm and then unloading ten pages of background merely moves the delay. Early entry is right when the normal state itself requires experience, when change would otherwise look arbitrary or when the audience must understand what will be lost.

The Odyssey enters after most of its hero's absence has already occurred, then distributes earlier adventures through recollection and report. That order lets home, reputation and return organise episodes that a straight travel log would value differently. The lesson is not to begin every story late. It is to choose the point at which expectation can become specific.

Build units that change the model

Break the material into units according to structural work rather than length. In the bridge case, one unit establishes the altered inspection figure. Another shows that a prior warning was downgraded. Another makes the hospital route urgent. Another reveals who can order the bridge reopened. Each unit changes what the audience believes, what someone can do or what a decision will cost.

A unit can be a scene, paragraph, sequence, anecdote, chapter or episode. Its scale matters less than its operation. State the change in one sentence. If you cannot, the unit may be atmosphere, explanation or repetition. Those functions can earn space, but they should not masquerade as development.

Cause is one operation. Contrast, recurrence and accumulation are others. A series of nearly identical maintenance reports may become powerful when one missing signature breaks the pattern. Two accounts placed beside each other may expose incompatible standards. Repetition should gather meaning or prepare rupture. If it supplies the same information at the same pressure, keep the strongest instance.

Make the middle alter the available future

Beginnings create a contract and endings concentrate consequence. Middles must repeatedly change the route between them. The common failure is substitution: a fresh obstacle appears, is overcome and leaves the same goal, knowledge and options in place. Activity rises while the story's future remains unchanged.

For each attempt, ask what it teaches, costs or closes. The engineer telephones a director and learns that reopening authority sits above her. She seeks an independent assessment and discovers that the only available specialist is across the country. She checks the original scan and finds a second alteration, turning possible clerical error into a pattern. Each move changes later action.

Escalation therefore concerns changed conditions rather than louder danger. A practical problem can become a conflict of duty. An attempt to protect the public can threaten employment. An effort to preserve employment can compromise evidence. The pressure increases because values and options collide, not because the story keeps raising the declared stakes.

A midpoint need not sit at fifty per cent. It is any turn after which continuing the old strategy no longer makes sense. A goal may change, an ally may become unreliable, a victory may expose a larger problem or the audience

may learn that it has been tracking the wrong object. The useful question is whether the second half inherits a different field from the first.

Allocate knowledge by consequence

Create two timelines. The first records event order: what happened when. The second records telling order: when the audience learns each fact. The gap between them is a principal source of suspense, curiosity, surprise and irony. It is also a principal source of accidental confusion and factual distortion.

In the bridge case, revealing the altered data first creates concern about safety. Opening with an email deletion creates suspicion of concealment. Beginning with proof that the bridge was sound shifts attention towards governance and false alarm. The same event record supports different stories because order changes what the audience is licensed to infer.

Withhold information only when the chosen viewpoint, evidence or purpose makes the delay honest. A first-person narrator may not know who changed a file. A documentary editor may know but delay the answer to let viewers evaluate competing claims. Neither may suppress a decisive fact merely because the story becomes neater without it.

Track who knows each fact and when. If a decision depends on information never received, the account should not judge it as though the information were available. If the audience knows more than a character, use the gap for consequence rather than condescension. If the audience knows less, supply enough evidence to make revision possible.

Give decisions visible alternatives

A climax is the point at which accumulated conditions produce a decisive alteration. It may be a battle, confession, vote, recognition, refusal or quiet act of compliance. Size does not give it rank. Later units inherit its consequence.

The bridge engineer's decision matters only if the alternatives are legible. Reopen and restore the route, accepting an uncertain safety risk. Keep the

closure and delay emergency traffic, accepting professional and public costs. Seek more evidence and lose time. Earlier sections should establish who can choose, which duties apply and what each option protects.

Avoid giving people cleaner choices than they had. Retrospect supplies information that participants lacked and makes rejected options look obvious. In factual narrative, reconstruct the decision field from contemporary evidence, authority, uncertainty and time pressure. A bad choice can remain blameworthy without being rewritten as a conscious choice of every later consequence.

Decisive action should use capacities, relationships or knowledge already established. Preparation need not advertise the exact solution. It should make the outcome belong to this story. Chance may defeat or rescue real people. When chance ends fiction, its meaning depends on what the characters did before chance arrived and what the accident reveals rather than solves.

Spend time according to significance

Once the sequence works, decide which moments deserve duration. Scene expands when the audience must experience perception, choice, interaction or change. Summary compresses when pattern or consequence matters more than each instance. Omission removes what the audience can reconstruct without losing the causal or emotional line.

The bridge inquiry may require one meeting in scene because a question changes who is accountable. Six weeks of document requests may be summarised because their shared function is delay. A one-line discovery may deserve a page if it forces the decisive choice. Time on the page or screen tells the audience where significance lies, whether the teller intends that signal or not.

Use repetition deliberately. A familiar inspection phrase may recur until one altered word becomes visible. A live audience may welcome a refrain because participation is part of the event. A thriller may use repeated routines to make intrusion measurable. Repetition that neither changes

meaning nor creates expectation becomes padding.

After dense pressure, permit the audience to update. Consequence often needs stillness. A rapid revelation followed by another rapid revelation can reduce both to information. Release is structural when it shows what the event has done to action, relation or understanding.

End where consequence is readable

Follow the decisive turn far enough for the selected difference to acquire meaning. The bridge may reopen after an independent inspection, yet the story may need to continue until the altered records are traced, the engineer's authority changes or the inquiry exposes a procedure that remains unsafe. Another telling may stop earlier because its subject was her decision under pressure rather than the institution's reform.

Do not equate closure with total explanation. Records may never show who authorised an alteration. A strong factual ending names that limit instead of arranging insinuation until one person appears guilty. Fiction can leave an external result unknown when the prepared decision or recognition has occurred. Ambiguity should preserve shaped alternatives, not hide missing work.

A final image, phrase or object may return from the opening if it has changed value. The bridge carrying morning traffic means something different after the audience knows how little justified the confidence placed in it. Mere repetition creates symmetry without consequence.

Stop creating new obligations near the end. A new motive or disputed fact in the final paragraph enlarges the story when it needs to settle. Residue is different. It shows what the established action has left: a rule, scar, absence, habit, doubt or altered future.

Revise with four maps

Revision begins with the state map. For every major unit, write what changed in circumstances, options, knowledge, relation or interpretation. Repeated answers reveal stasis. Keep the strongest instance, combine several into an accumulating pattern or alter the later unit so it changes the field.

Next make a promise map. Mark the expectations created by the title, opening, viewpoint and unusually emphasised details. Find where each is paid, transformed or consciously left open. Many weak endings result from obligations the draft created and forgot. Removing an unnecessary promise can improve the structure more than adding another payoff.

Then make an information map. List what each central participant knows, what the audience knows and what the teller can support. Look for facts delivered after the decision they should affect, secrets withheld without a viewpoint reason and causal claims created by proximity rather than evidence.

Finally make a time map. Mark scene, summary, repetition, pause and omission. Ask whether duration matches significance. Cut entrances, exits and connective chronology once orientation is secure. Expand the moment where a value becomes costly, a model breaks or an option closes.

Read the revised work without checking the plan. Note where you stop predicting, where you become confused and where an effect arrives before its cause has been made legible. Structure exists in the audience's experience, not in the diagram beside the draft.

Adapt the controls to the medium

A spoken anecdote relies on shared context, voice and immediate response. Its orientation must be brief and its reason for telling clear. A live teller can repeat, accelerate, explain or stop according to the room. A written version loses that feedback and must build more of its guidance into the sequence.

Long prose can move through consciousness, commentary and duration with unusual freedom. It can compress decades in a sentence or hold one second across pages. Its danger is unlimited explanation. Because the writer can state almost anything, commentary may protect the reader from every inference and flatten discovery.

Drama works through bodies in shared time. Exposition gains force when knowledge changes power between people now. Entrances, exits, gesture and silence distribute attention. Film adds framing, editing and sound. A cut can create comparison or imply cause, which gives factual editors a duty to distinguish a compelling succession from a supported relation.

Audio makes voice and unseen space carry more work. Too many unidentified speakers create confusion quickly. Reorientation, vocal distinction and sound with a clear narrative function matter more than atmosphere added for polish.

Interactive narrative divides control. Designers arrange possibilities and consequences; participants choose some routes or actions. A choice becomes structural when the system remembers it, changes later options or alters how the participant understands agency. Cosmetic branching can offer the sensation of control while preserving one underlying line. The full design and history of games belongs to its neighbouring title; the boundary lesson here is that participation changes who controls timing, discovery and consequence.

Across every medium, the same audit remains useful: what difference has been selected, what is the audience tracking, what changes the field, where do stakes attach, who controls knowledge, how is significance distributed and what new state permits the telling to stop?

How we know

No single theory establishes a universal story shape. Aristotle analysed Greek tragedy and epic. Propp identified recurring functions in a corpus of Russian wonder tales. Labov and Waletzky described recurring jobs in personal narratives from particular speech communities. Lord and Finnegan showed why oral composition and performance cannot be reduced to fixed text. Formalist and narratological work distinguished represented events from their arrangement in discourse. Mandler and Johnson, Brewer and Lichtenstein, Hoeken and van Vliet, Zwaan and colleagues, Green and Brock and later meta-analyses tested aspects of recall, information order, situation models, absorption and persuasion.

These sources support distinctions and bounded mechanisms, not a recipe that predicts artistic success. Much experimental work uses short written materials, constrained tasks and samples that do not stand for all audiences or media. Oral, visual, long-form, culturally situated and interactive practices distribute attention differently. Research since the first event-model studies continues to test whether readers construct new models, update existing ones or do both under different conditions. The defensible conclusion is limited: audiences track changing situations, knowledge and consequence, while storytellers can influence the order and duration of that tracking. Satisfaction still depends on purpose, convention, performance, medium and audience.

What People Get Wrong

"Every story needs three acts"

The three-act model is useful when it names broad phases: establishment, development and resolution. It becomes misleading when those phases are treated as natural law, assigned fixed percentages and used to reject any work whose turns fall elsewhere. Aristotle discussed a whole with a beginning, middle and end, but he did not hand down the modern screenplay template. Freytag's nineteenth-century account described five-part dramatic movement in a particular theatrical tradition. Later teachers simplified, combined and commercialised such schemes because a diagram is easier to sell than judgement.

Campbell proposed the hero's journey as a monomyth organised around departure, initiation and return. Later craft teaching often converted that comparative interpretation into required beats. The pattern can illuminate quest narratives. It fits less well when the centre is collective, domestic, tragic, episodic or resistant to return. Use it as a lens on selected material, not as a passport all stories must carry.

Many stories can be divided into three parts after the fact because almost anything extended has an entry, continuation and stopping point. The same work can often be divided into two, four or five units by moving the boundaries. That flexibility shows that acts are analytical choices as well as compositional tools. It does not show that three acts caused the effect. Episodic tales, framed narratives, serial forms, oral performances, ritual retellings and interactive works may organise expectation through different units. A turn belongs where conditions change, even if page arithmetic says otherwise. Use acts to diagnose large changes in pressure. Do not move an event merely so that a percentage point on a page receives company. Structure can be counted after completion in many incompatible ways. The useful act boundary identifies a genuine change in strategy, knowledge or possibility, rather than making the chart look balanced.

"Conflict is the engine of every story"

Conflict is a strong source of consequence. Opposed aims make choices visible and can drive escalation. The mistake is turning a frequent device into a definition. Some stories organise attention around discovery, courtship, work, ritual, travel, repair, transformation, wonder or the gradual recognition of a pattern. They may contain friction without making antagonistic struggle their governing principle.

The claim became persuasive because Western drama theory, screenwriting instruction and heroic plot summaries favour visible opposition. Other theories place experienced emotion, social performance, pattern or transformation nearer the centre. Classical Sanskrit dramaturgy, for example, gives sustained attention to *rasa*, the aesthetic experience produced through performance, rather than defining drama through one model of antagonism. That tradition has its own history and debates; it is evidence against universality, not a replacement law.

Conflict also gives teachers a concrete question: who wants what, and what blocks them? Keep the question where it works. Elsewhere ask what difference the audience is tracking, what changes the field and where consequence attaches. Forcing every relation into combat can make care look like opposition, make contemplation seem deficient and turn unlike traditions into failed versions of one favoured model.

"Start at the beginning"

Chronology feels honest and clear because it mirrors clock order. It is often the right structure for instructions, testimony and explanations where sequence determines responsibility. It is not a default for every story. The earliest event may occur years before the governing difference becomes visible. Beginning there asks the audience to store background before knowing why it matters.

Starting later can create curiosity, put consequence under immediate pressure and let earlier material enter when it changes a live interpretation. Starting chronologically can also protect fairness when the order of

warnings, permissions or observations determines what somebody could reasonably have known. Structure serves the tracked object; it should not conceal the sequence that object depends on. Beginning earlier can be necessary when the baseline itself is the subject or when later choices cannot be judged without the original conditions. The first event in time and the first useful event in discourse are separate choices. The correction is not "start in the middle". Enter where expectation becomes trackable, then choose chronology, flashback or reconstruction according to what the audience must know.

"Higher stakes make a story more gripping"

Writers often respond to weak attention by threatening death, national collapse or public disgrace. The result can be larger and less involving. Stakes work through attachment, specificity and credible consequence. The loss of one person's trust may carry more pressure than the destruction of an unnamed city because the audience understands the relation and the options at risk.

Scale inflation also damages belief. When every setback is catastrophic, the audience stops calibrating danger. Probability matters too. A remote apocalypse can feel weightless beside a modest loss that the story has made imminent. Strong escalation changes the cost or the values in collision. A minor lie protects comfort, then damages trust, then forces a choice between confession and further harm. The external event may remain small while its meaning deepens. Ask whose future changes, what cannot be restored and why this outcome matters to them. Magnitude without attachment is noise.

"A twist fixes a weak plot"

A twist can produce one sharp revision. It cannot supply missing consequence across everything that came before. Weak stories often conceal information because concealment feels like structure. The final disclosure then depends on facts no viewpoint could fairly have hidden, or reveals a secret that changes no decision after the gasp.

A sound reversal performs two jobs. It preserves a reasonable earlier reading and supports a stronger later one. It should survive a second encounter, when surprise has gone and construction is visible. Rereading may reveal cues that looked ordinary at first yet never required the audience to ignore obvious evidence. The reversal should also change action, judgement or cost. Test the story without it. If no question, pressure or relation holds attention, the reveal is a trapdoor beneath an empty room. A strong twist concentrates structure already present; it does not create that structure backwards. Repair the sequence first, then decide whether reinterpretation improves it.

"Show, do not tell"

The slogan corrects abstract assertion. Calling a character generous is weaker than giving the audience evidence from which generosity can be judged. Yet a strict ban on telling would destroy summary, commentary, transition, history, interior reflection and the ability to cross time. Novels would record every breakfast. Documentaries would drown in footage. Conversation would become intolerable before lunch.

The choice is functional. Showing is selective too: a camera angle, gesture or chosen detail can guide judgement as strongly as direct explanation. Use scene when the audience needs to experience a decision, relation or change as it unfolds. Use summary when pattern, duration or context matters more than continuous action. Tell a fact when dramatic concealment would waste time. Show evidence when the judgement is disputed. Summary can carry force when compression reveals a pattern no single scene could show. The bad habit is not telling. It is giving conclusions where evidence matters, or staging material whose only achievement is delaying information.

"A good ending explains everything"

Complete explanation can flatten consequence. It turns characters into solved equations and closes questions the story never promised to settle. The belief persists because uncertainty is uncomfortable and because commercial forms often reward a visible answer. Some genres do owe specific closure: a fair-play mystery that never identifies its solution has probably broken its contract. Even there, solving the crime need not solve grief, trust or justice.

An ending should bring the governing difference to a meaningful state. Explanation can continue indefinitely because every cause has earlier conditions and every consequence extends beyond the frame. Selection requires a stopping rule. The work ends when further material would open a new central object rather than deepen the one already carried. It may answer the external question, transform it or leave sharply defined possibilities open. Factual narratives should preserve uncertainty that the record cannot remove. Fiction should distinguish ambiguity from omission. The final measure is whether the audience can understand what changed, why it mattered and what remains because of it.

Use It

Draw the state change

Write two plain sentences. The first describes the world before the selected difference. The second describes it after. Use categories that can be tested: what is possible, known, believed, valued, permitted or expected. "Before the meeting, the board assumed the figures were sound. Afterwards, it knew two years of decisions rested on altered data" gives a story. "This is about a difficult board meeting" gives a topic.

Now place every major unit between those sentences and state what it changes. Some units may supply necessary orientation or atmosphere, but too many will reveal that the draft is preserving material rather than building a transition. Where several units perform the same operation, keep the

strongest, combine them into a pattern or make the later instance change the meaning of the earlier one.

This map works for quiet stories. The final difference may concern interpretation, relation or self-knowledge rather than external action. It also works for factual accounts because it exposes overclaim. If the evidence proves only that suspicion increased, do not write the after-state as established guilt.

Define the telling relation

Write who tells, who receives and what the telling is doing now. A private confession, a court statement, an oral performance, a documentary reconstruction and a bedtime tale may concern the same events while carrying different obligations. The relation determines what needs explanation, what authority the teller possesses and what the audience may reasonably infer from tone.

For first-person work, separate experience from retrospective understanding. The person who lived an event knew less than the person recounting it later. Decide whether the narration preserves that earlier uncertainty or comments from the later vantage point. Unmarked movement between the two can create false foresight.

For live or spoken work, rehearse with attention to response rather than wording alone. Where do listeners laugh, lose orientation, anticipate a refrain or supply their own knowledge? A fixed recording cannot adapt later, so its structure must carry more orientation. For factual work, add a further sentence: what can this teller support, and what remains reported, inferred or unknown?

Name what the audience is tracking

Complete the sentence: "The audience continues because it wants to know, judge, recognise or experience..." Do not demand a question if the form depends on familiarity, ritual return or performance. Do demand a specific object of attention. "What happens?" is too broad. "Whether she will reopen the bridge before an independent inspection" can organise a sequence.

List the plausible states of that object. An outcome may be open, a cause may have competing explanations, a relationship may be moving towards repair or rupture, or a familiar pattern may be approaching the point where variation matters. Each major unit should alter the probabilities, values or meaning of those states.

Check whether the tracked object changes. A story can begin with individual blame and move towards institutional design, or with physical survival and move towards moral cost. The shift must grow from the first line rather than replace it. Where the audience is awaiting an answer the work has quietly abandoned, repair the contract or remove the original promise.

Map options and knowledge

For every decisive moment, write what options existed, what each cost and who knew what. This catches weak climaxes in fiction and hindsight distortion in factual work. A choice has little weight when alternatives remain invisible. A judgement is unfair when later knowledge is placed inside an earlier decision.

Keep two timelines. One records the order of events. The other records the order of disclosure. Mark every departure from chronology and state what it earns. A flashback may change the meaning of a present action. A delayed fact may create curiosity. A repeated event may expose perspective. If the altered order produces only surface mystery, chronology may be stronger.

Then examine the audience's knowledge. Does it possess enough evidence to form a model? Is a secret withheld because the viewpoint lacks access, or because the teller wants a twist? Does juxtaposition imply a cause no

source establishes? Knowledge should be distributed to create honest inference, not to make the audience lose a game whose rules were hidden.

Audit pace by significance

Mark every passage as scene, summary, repetition, pause or omission. Then compare duration with importance. A minor transition expanded into dialogue may slow the story while a life-changing decision is compressed into report. The audience reads allocation of time as allocation of meaning.

Scene is useful when perception, choice, interaction or uncertainty must be experienced. Summary is useful when pattern, scale or elapsed time matters more than each occurrence. Repetition can create participation, expectation or deterioration. Omission can preserve movement when the audience can cross the gap without losing cause or consequence.

Look especially at the middle. Has the audience been waiting in the same way for several units? Have three obstacles left the same options open? Does each chapter end by withholding information with no other change? Pace stalls when the model stalls. Repair it by changing the field, not by shortening every sentence. After a dense turn, allow enough consequence for the audience to update before demanding another revision.

Keep a truth and provenance ledger

For factual narrative, label every significant claim as observed, documented, reported, reconstructed, inferred, composite, illustrative or unknown. The categories need not appear beside every sentence, but the final work should never let one pass as another. Reconstructed dialogue needs a source or a clear label. A composite person cannot be allowed to look like a documented individual. An illustrative case should announce itself before concrete detail creates false provenance.

Next mark every causal connector: because, led to, forced, produced, prevented, resulted in. Ask whether the source establishes that relation at the stated strength. Sequence can support a hypothesis without proving it. A compelling cut, chapter order or personal motive can make one explanation

feel inevitable while leaving alternatives outside the frame.

Finally, test representative weight. One vivid life may reveal a mechanism or consequence. It cannot by itself establish prevalence. Keep the story and the distribution in their proper roles. Narrative supplies human scale and memory. Evidence determines how far the example may travel.

The limits

Structure does not guarantee truth, beauty, decency or attention. A well-arranged story can be false, manipulative, sentimental or dead. Language, performance, image, sound, cultural knowledge and the audience's condition can outweigh an elegant sequence. Some storytelling is undertaken for witness, ceremony, teaching, healing, identity or obligation, with entertainment as a secondary concern or no concern at all.

The model in this book is therefore a set of controls, not a universal grammar. It was built from narratology, psychology, oral-performance scholarship and craft traditions that study different materials. Much experimental work concerns short written stories and constrained audiences. A live telling, long novel, sacred narrative or interactive system may distribute attention differently.

Attention itself is morally neutral. Suspense can conceal weak evidence. Attachment can be used to make an exceptional case feel typical. Closure can make political choices appear natural. The better the structure, the greater the duty to examine what it leaves outside.

The one thing to keep

Keep the audience's changing model in view.

A story is not a container into which events are placed. It is a controlled sequence of revisions. At the beginning, the audience holds one account of what matters. Each major unit changes circumstances, options, knowledge, relation or interpretation. Pace tells the audience where to spend significance. Viewpoint determines which evidence is available. The ending reveals whether the first selected difference deserved the time.

This changes the practical question. Do not ask first whether the work has three acts, enough conflict or a dramatic opening. Ask what the audience is tracking now, what this part changes, and what honest new model becomes possible because it is here.

When a story fails, the audience is often still receiving events while no longer revising anything. When a story holds, even a familiar ending can remain alive because process, meaning, performance or cost continues to change.

That is structure: not the shape drawn over the work, but the sequence of minds changing under it.

Terms

Narrative

A representation of events or change across time. Narrative can be fictional, factual, spoken, written, visual or interactive, and may organise material without forming a conventionally complete story. Its boundaries depend on purpose.

Story

The selected difference and consequential relations an audience reconstructs from a telling. In everyday use the word also names the telling itself, so context must show which sense is intended.

Plot

The organised pattern of events and consequences that gives a story direction. Plot exceeds chronology because arrangement changes what actions cause, permit, reveal or prevent. It gives selected events cumulative force.

Discourse

The form and order in which a story is presented. Discourse includes viewpoint, sequence, duration, repetition and withholding, distinguishing the telling from the represented chain of events.

Fabula

The Russian formalist term for the events as an audience reconstructs them in chronological and causal order. It provides one side of the distinction between events and their arrangement.

Syuzhet

The Russian formalist term for the artistic ordering and presentation of events. Flashback, delayed explanation and parallel cutting belong to syuzhet rather than to underlying chronology.

Event

A change of state within the represented world. An event may be an action, occurrence, discovery or meaningful failure to act, provided conditions differ because of it. Its scale depends on the telling.

Beat

A small turn in action, knowledge, expectation or relation. Beats help diagnose whether a scene develops or merely continues, though practitioners use the term at different scales. Their boundaries remain interpretive.

Scene

A relatively continuous unit in which action unfolds at close range. Scene expands time so that behaviour, perception and choice can be experienced rather than grouped into summary.

Act

A large division of dramatic or narrative movement. Acts can mark major changes in aim, pressure or knowledge, but no single act count governs every form.

Exposition

Information needed to understand people, setting, prior events or constraints. Exposition works best when supplied where it changes a live expectation, decision or interpretation. Too much too early burdens attention.

Inciting incident

A common craft term for the event that disturbs the starting condition and activates the main line of action. Some stories begin after it or distribute disturbance gradually.

Stakes

What may be gained, lost, preserved or transformed through an outcome. Stakes depend on attachment and credible consequence rather than physical scale alone. They can be material, social, emotional or moral.

Conflict

Opposition among aims, duties, people, systems or conditions. Conflict often clarifies choice and consequence, but discovery, accumulation, transformation and ritual can organise stories through other pressures.

Causality

The relation in which one condition or event helps produce another. Narrative makes causal chains intelligible, but factual sequence must not be treated as proof of cause.

Contingency

The presence of plausible alternatives and dependence on conditions that might have differed. Contingency prevents hindsight from turning one realised path into the only path available.

Suspense

Future-directed uncertainty about an outcome, action or cost. Suspense can remain when the final result is known if process, timing, experience or consequence stays uncertain.

Curiosity

Interest directed towards a missing cause, past event or explanation. Curiosity often begins with a visible result and structures the audience's attempt to reconstruct how it arose.

Surprise

A rapid revision caused by information that violates a prior expectation. Strong surprise makes earlier material more coherent afterwards and changes more than the audience's pulse.

Dramatic irony

An information gap in which the audience understands something a character does not. Attention comes from anticipating when knowledge and consequence will meet rather than from shared ignorance.

Focalisation

The selection or restriction of narrative information through a perceiving position. It asks who sees, knows or experiences, which is distinct from asking who speaks.

Point of view

The position from which a story is presented, including person, distance and access to minds. Point of view governs knowledge, sympathy, tone and the fairness of concealment.

Narrator

The voice or agency that presents a narrative. A narrator may be a character or remain outside the action, and may be reliable, limited, deceptive or mistaken.

Narratee

The person or audience to whom a narrative is addressed within or through the work. A narratee may be named, visibly present or implied by what the teller explains and withholds.

Analepsis

A movement backwards from the current telling point to an earlier event, commonly called flashback. It earns space when the past changes an expectation active in the present.

Prolepsis

A movement forwards to a later event or anticipated future, commonly called flashforward. It can create fate, suspense or comparison by changing what the audience expects from the present.

Ellipsis

The omission of a span of event time from the telling. Ellipsis compresses routine, hides information or makes the audience infer what occurred across a meaningful gap.

Reversal

A change in the direction or apparent fortune of the action. Reversal gains force when prior conditions produce it and when it alters the available future.

Recognition

A movement from ignorance to consequential knowledge, associated with Aristotle's *anagnorisis*. Recognition matters structurally when what becomes known changes action, relation or judgement.

Closure

The degree to which a story settles its governing questions and consequences. Closure can be partial or open without becoming vague, provided the remaining uncertainty has clear boundaries. It is a matter of degree, judged against the promises the telling created.

Go Deeper

Ursula K. Le Guin, *Steering the Craft: A Twenty-First-Century Guide to Sailing the Sea of Story*

Begin here if you want practice rather than a system. Le Guin treats prose as something heard, shaped and revised, with exercises on voice, sentence length, point of view, repetition, detail and indirect narration. It concentrates on written narrative, so it will not cover oral performance, film editing or factual evidence duties. Its value is judgement: each exercise makes you notice what a choice permits and what it costs. The revised 2015 edition adds material on writing workshops without turning the exercises into commandments.

Aristotle, Poetics, translated by Malcolm Heath

Read this for the argument that arrangement matters more than ornament. Aristotle examines tragedy and epic through action, reversal, recognition, probability, necessity and emotional effect. Many later craft manuals claim his authority while giving rules he never wrote, so the short primary text is the useful correction. Heath's Penguin translation includes an accessible introduction and notes. The limitation matters: this is an analysis of selected Greek forms, based on a surviving text that may itself be incomplete, not a universal manual for every culture or medium. Read the sections on plot, reversal and recognition, then test where their claims stop travelling.

Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film

Use Chatman for the clean distinction between the events represented and the manner of their presentation. He moves across fiction and cinema to examine order, duration, character, setting, point of view and the relation between narrator and audience. The terminology is more technical than Le Guin's and some later narratology revises his categories. That difficulty is useful once the basic model is secure. The book gives precise names to structural choices that practical advice often treats as instinct. Keep a current novel or film beside it; the abstractions become clearer when you can ask what changed in a particular telling decision.

Jo-ann Archibald, Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit

Read Archibald to challenge the assumption that stories are detachable products made by solitary authors for anonymous consumers. Drawing on work with Stó:lō and other Coast Salish Elders and storytellers, she develops principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness and synergy. The book concerns education, knowledge and ethical relation as much as craft. It should not be converted into a general formula for all Indigenous traditions. Its value is showing that who may tell, how one listens and what obligations follow can belong to structure itself. It is the strongest counterweight here to craft books that treat attention as a resource to be captured without asking what the teller owes in return.

Notes and Sources

Method, scope and source control

This book treats storytelling as a family of practices rather than a single culturally neutral object. Its central formulation, structure as the management of an audience's changing model across time, is an explanatory synthesis. No source is made responsible for that exact sentence. The model was tested against written fiction, drama, film, oral performance, personal narrative, factual reporting and interactive work, then narrowed where evidence from one medium, corpus or population would not travel safely.

The words *story*, *narrative*, *plot* and *discourse* have competing definitions. Chatman, Genette and Abbott supply major reference points. This book uses a practical distinction between represented events and relations, and their selection and presentation to an audience. The terms remain working tools rather than a claim that narratological schools share one vocabulary.

Sources, editions and current guidance were rechecked on 2 September 2026. Stable primary works, university-press scholarship, peer-reviewed research and official ethical guidance take priority. Craft books are used for

practice and judgement, not as experimental proof. Every unnamed mini-example in the body is illustrative. The bridge case in the operating section is explicitly invented. The named works, traditions, researchers and performers are documented rather than composite.

The Whole Thing in One Page and Why You Should Care

The distinction between event order and telling order draws on Russian formalism as developed in later narratology, especially Chatman's *Story and Discourse* and Genette's *Narrative Discourse*. The account of suspense, curiosity and surprise draws on Brewer and Lichtenstein, Sternberg, and Hoeken and van Vliet. These works support narrower claims about how information order can organise response in selected written materials. They do not establish one complete psychology of attention or a single mechanism applying equally to oral, visual, long-form and interactive work.

Memento was checked against the film itself and reliable production descriptions. Its principal colour sequence is presented in reverse chronological order, while the black-and-white sequence moves chronologically and the two meet. The manuscript does not claim that the entire film merely runs backwards, or that its construction reproduces anterograde amnesia clinically. It uses the form to show how telling order changes causal orientation and trust.

Sophocles drew on an existing Oedipus tradition. Exact audience knowledge cannot be recovered spectator by spectator, so the body makes the limited claim that the tragedy did not depend on concealing its broad result from spectators familiar with the myth. Its pressure can operate through dramatic irony, recognition and consequence rather than outcome ignorance alone.

Lord's research with South Slavic singers supports the statement that long oral epics could be composed in performance through formulas, themes and inherited episode patterns. The claim is limited to the traditions and performers studied. It does not turn oral-formulaic theory into a universal

account of memory, authorship or oral narrative.

Narrative persuasion is deliberately stated with bounds. Green and Brock's experiments linked transportation in selected public narratives to story-consistent beliefs. Van Laer and colleagues, Braddock and Dillard, and Rahmani and colleagues provide later meta-analytic evidence that narratives can affect attitudes, beliefs, intentions or behaviour under studied conditions. Rahmani and colleagues analysed 77 randomised experimental comparisons reported in 57 articles, across 24,380 participants, and found positive average effects against no-message or placebo controls. Their smaller set of direct comparisons with information-equivalent non-narrative messages was less decisive. Effects varied by setting, outcome, message and design, and laboratory or online estimates tended to exceed field estimates. The body therefore does not claim that a story defeats evidence, works on every audience or is inherently more persuasive than a fair non-narrative comparison.

Core Idea 1: A Story Selects a Difference

The Odyssey begins late in the represented history, after years of Odysseus's absence, with Ithaca under pressure from the suitors and Telemachus coming of age. Odysseus later narrates substantial earlier adventures to the Phaeacians. The manuscript uses this arrangement to illustrate selection and delayed backstory, not to reduce the poem to one modern plot device.

Aristotle gives arranged action priority within his theory of tragedy and discusses a whole with a beginning, middle and end. His surviving *Poetics* concerns selected Greek dramatic and epic forms. It does not provide fixed modern act percentages or a general law covering every culture and medium.

Forster supplies the famous contrast between royal deaths linked by sequence and by grief. The manuscript paraphrases the example rather than quoting it, then restricts the lesson. Direct cause is a powerful structural relation, but comparison, recurrence, framing, accumulation and information

order can organise other narratives.

The caution about factual selection follows standard historical, documentary and journalistic method. Selecting a boundary is unavoidable; making that boundary seem natural, complete or causally sufficient is not. Sequence and emphasis can guide inference without proving the relation implied.

Core Idea 2: Attention Needs Something to Track

The frame of *One Thousand and One Nights* presents Shahrazad telling stories to delay her execution, with stories frequently embedded inside others. The surviving collection developed through long transmission across languages, regions, manuscripts and print traditions. The body therefore refuses the popular simplification that every night in one fixed original text ends with the same cliffhanger mechanism.

Brewer and Lichtenstein's structural-affect account distinguishes suspense, curiosity and surprise through relations between event structure and discourse. Sternberg provides a wider literary account of temporal ordering. Hoeken and van Vliet experimentally varied the arrangement of one professional written story. Together they support the use of these categories as analytical controls, not as exhaustive or culturally universal emotions.

The known-outcome example involving a ship disaster is illustrative. It makes no historical claim about one film or passenger. The broader point is supported by repeated reading and viewing, historical narrative and the literature on the paradox of suspense: foreknowledge may change or weaken one response while leaving process, timing, cost, performance and character knowledge available for attention. The manuscript does not claim that spoilers never matter.

The governing object is a revision tool devised for this book. No study establishes one ideal number of questions or attention lines for a given length.

Core Idea 3: Each Part Must Alter the Field

Aristotle's preference for events joined by probability or necessity provides one early account of consequential arrangement. Mandler and Johnson found that structural organisation affected recall for controlled written stories. Zwaan, Langston and Graesser proposed that readers monitor dimensions including time, space, protagonist, causation and intentionality while constructing situation models. Later work has tested how such models are built, updated and sometimes retained rather than wholly replaced. These studies use bounded materials and tasks. They support the modest claim that readers track changing situations, not a universal grammar of artistic success.

The book's field language is an editorial synthesis. A unit may change circumstances, options, knowledge, relations or interpretation. Direct causal chains are one important case, while contrast, recurrence, framing and accumulation are retained to avoid defining all narrative as linear cause.

The examples of missed calls, concealments, maintenance reports and colleagues are invented illustrations. They make no claim about reported cases. The warnings concerning financial crises, wars, institutional failure and biography concern causal compression: a coherent narrative line can exceed evidence when several conditions, feedbacks and decisions interact.

Core Idea 4: Stakes Need a Point of Attachment

The account of stakes combines dramatic theory, rhetorical narratology and practical analysis. It treats character as a common carrier of consequence rather than a compulsory individual hero. Households, groups, institutions, places, species, practices and obligations may also organise what changes.

The ship, recipe, leader and town examples are illustrative rather than reported incidents. They are not evidence of a measured rule that small losses always engage audiences more than large ones. The narrower claim is that scale alone does not specify why an event matters. The audience needs a legible relation between change and something valued.

Archibald's *Indigenous Storywork* is based on collaboration with Stó:lō and other Coast Salish Elders and storytellers in educational settings. Her seven principles are respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness and synergy. The body names only those needed for its argument and marks the setting. It does not present one Indigenous doctrine, extract a universal craft formula or treat stories as material detached from the relations under which they were shared.

Identification is distinguished from liking. This is a limited analytical point: audiences can predict, judge or attend to characters whom they neither resemble nor approve. It is not a complete theory of empathy or audience response.

Core Idea 5: Viewpoint Allocates Knowledge

Russian formalist *fabula* and *syuzhet*, Chatman's story and discourse, and Genette's order, duration and frequency are related but non-identical schemes. The body does not merge them into one settled terminology. It uses their shared practical implication that represented events and audience access can be organised differently.

Kurosawa's *Rashomon* presents incompatible testimony about a killing and sexual assault through accounts shaped by the speakers' interests and self-presentation. The film does not offer one neutral replay that resolves the event. Its use here is formal and ethical: repetition can change meaning when perspective changes, and testimony cannot be treated as camera footage.

The account of *Memento* follows the limits stated above. The manuscript says the arrangement creates an analogue of causal disorientation, not a clinical simulation of Leonard Shelby's condition.

The Odyssey includes external narration, speeches by many figures and Odysseus's extended account to the Phaeacians. What he tells and when he identifies himself operate within his need for recognition and help. This supports the distinction between teller, viewpoint and audience without claiming that every embedded narration has the same function.

The documentary examples are descriptions of possible editorial inferences. Moving a pause, changing a question or juxtaposing unrelated images may mislead depending on the source record and the relation the edit invites. The text does not claim that every non-chronological cut is deceptive.

Core Idea 6: Pace Distributes Significance

Genette's treatment of duration and frequency informs the distinction between event time and telling time. Scene, summary, pause, repetition and ellipsis are practical categories whose boundaries can blur. Their use signals emphasis but does not determine one audience response mechanically.

Milman Parry and Albert Lord recorded South Slavic epic performance in the 1930s. Avdo Međedović was among the most accomplished singers represented in the collection and could create exceptionally long songs through formulaic composition in performance. The body avoids unstable line-count superlatives and keeps the cultural and research setting visible.

Finnegan's *Oral Literature in Africa*, first published in 1970 and republished in a revised open edition in 2012, is grounded in fieldwork and comparative scholarship across diverse settings. Her analysis stresses performance, occasion, voice, music, audience and social function. The body explicitly rejects the inference that Africa contains one oral form or that a continent can be represented by a single structural model.

The comparisons among prose, theatre, film, audio and interactive narrative concern affordances, not fixed laws. Individual works mix media, resist convention and distribute control differently.

Core Idea 7: The Ending Judges the Selection

Aristotle's reversal and recognition supply historical terms for changes in action and knowledge. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the ruler's investigation leads to recognition of his own place in the pollution he seeks to remove. The body uses this as a documented example of an ending changing the value of earlier action, not as a claim that every ending requires recognition or reversal.

The treatment of twists, open endings and codas is critical synthesis. The double test for a reversal, a reasonable first reading followed by a stronger second reading, is a practical standard rather than an experimental result. A coda's return to the present also draws on Labov's account of functions recurring in personal narrative, whose original evidence came from particular United States speech communities.

The examples of detectives, romances, rooms and inquiries are illustrative. Factual endings are required to preserve uncertainty when sources leave cause, motive or responsibility unsettled.

Operating sequence

The city-bridge case is invented and labelled as such in its first sentence. It is carried through the section to demonstrate how one event record can be selected differently for a private account, inquiry, news report or institutional defence. No bridge, engineer, hospital route, altered file or official is being reported. Times, roles and details were created only for the exercise.

The telling-situation distinction draws on rhetorical narratology, oral-performance research, documentary ethics and conversational narrative. Testimony, memorial, ceremony, comedy and campaigning create different obligations and stopping rules. These are analytical contrasts, not claims that every work in a category follows one structure.

The state map, promise map, information map and time map are original revision tools assembled from the book's model. No controlled trial validates the four-map method. Its purpose is diagnostic: make repeated states,

forgotten promises, unsupported knowledge gaps and misplaced duration visible enough to edit.

Factual guidance is consistent with the Society of Professional Journalists' 2014 Code of Ethics and the BBC Editorial Guidelines on accuracy as checked on 2 September 2026. A proposed replacement SPJ code was then under review and had not taken effect. The operative guidance stresses verification, context, source evaluation, correction and avoidance of misleading presentation. These rules apply within their own professional settings; the body extracts a stricter general principle that sequence, reconstruction and motive must not outrun evidence.

Interactive narrative is bounded to the allocation of control over route, timing, information and consequence. The full design, operation and history of games remains with *Video Games in a Hurry*.

What People Get Wrong

Modern three-act instruction is not quoted from Aristotle. *Poetics* discusses wholeness, complication and resolution, but supplies no fixed screenplay percentages. Freytag's nineteenth-century five-part scheme analyses a particular European dramatic tradition. Campbell's monomyth organises comparative material through departure, initiation and return. Propp derived recurring functions from a defined corpus of Russian wonder tales. These models may illuminate works within or beyond their source corpora; none entails one biological or cultural law for all narrative.

The discussion of *rasa* draws on the *Natyasastra* tradition, in which aesthetic experience and performance receive sustained analysis. Dating, textual history, translation and interpretation remain debated. The reference is limited to showing that a major dramatic theory need not define structure through antagonistic conflict alone. It is not offered as a substitute universal.

The other corrections concern chronology, scale, twists, scene and summary, and closure. They are practical arguments grounded in the model and selected examples, not measured laws. "Show, do not tell" is treated as a useful warning against unsupported assertion, not a ban on summary,

explanation or commentary.

Use It and Terms

The six lenses are editorial syntheses. They are not presented as experimentally validated interventions. The truth and provenance ledger is the controlling safeguard in factual work: observed fact, document, testimony, inference, reconstruction, composite and illustration must not be allowed to exchange labels for dramatic convenience.

Term definitions follow their use in this book. *Fabula*, *syuzhet*, focalisation, analepsis and prolepsis come from formalist and narratological traditions and may be drawn differently by other scholars. *Beat*, *inciting incident* and *stakes* are practitioner terms with unstable boundaries. Their entries give workable meanings rather than one governing standard.

Go Deeper

Publication and edition details were checked against author, publisher and library records. Le Guin's revised *Steering the Craft* was published by Mariner Books in 2015 and is now issued by Harper Perennial. Malcolm Heath's translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* appeared as a Penguin ebook in 1996; the current Penguin Classics paperback edition was published in 2003. Chatman's *Story and Discourse* was published by Cornell University Press in 1978. Archibald's *Indigenous Storywork* was published by UBC Press in 2008.

Bibliography

Primary works, films and foundational texts

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated with an introduction and notes by Malcolm Heath. London: Penguin Classics, 2003. Translation first published 1996.

Bharata Muni. *The Natyasastra: A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy and Histrionics*. Translated by Manomohan Ghosh. 2 vols. Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1951 and 1961.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Commemorative ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Edward Arnold, 1927.

Freytag, Gustav. *Freytag's Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*. Translated by Elias J. MacEwan. Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1894.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Translated by Emily Wilson. New York: W. W. Norton, 2018. First published 2017.

Kurosawa, Akira, dir. *Rashomon*. Film, 1950.

Labov, William, and Joshua Waletzky. "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience." In *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*, edited by June Helm, 12-44. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967.

Nolan, Christopher, dir. *Memento*. Film, 2000.

Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. 2nd ed. Translated by Laurence Scott and revised by Louis A. Wagner. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.

Sophocles. *The Three Theban Plays*. Translated by Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin Classics, 1984.

The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1,001 Nights. Translated by Malcolm C. Lyons, with Ursula Lyons. Introduction by Robert Irwin. 3 vols. London: Penguin Classics, 2008.

Modern research, theory and practice

Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Archibald, Jo-ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

Braddock, Kurt, and James Price Dillard. "Meta-Analytic Evidence for the

Persuasive Effect of Narratives on Beliefs, Attitudes, Intentions, and Behaviors." *Communication Monographs* 83, no. 4 (2016): 446-467. DOI: 10.1080/03637751.2015.1128555.

Brewer, William F., and Edward H. Lichtenstein. "Stories Are to Entertain: A Structural-Affect Theory of Stories." *Journal of Pragmatics* 6, no. 5 (1982): 473-486.

Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012. First published 1970. DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0025.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock. "The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79, no. 5 (2000): 701-721. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701.

Hoeken, Hans, and Mario van Vliet. "Suspense, Curiosity, and Surprise: How Discourse Structure Influences the Affective and Cognitive Processing of a Story." *Poetics* 27, nos. 4-5 (2000): 277-286. DOI: 10.1016/S0304-422X(99)00021-2.

Labov, William. *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *Steering the Craft: A Twenty-First-Century Guide to Sailing the Sea of Story*. Revised ed. Boston: Mariner Books, 2015.

Lord, Albert B. *The Singer of Tales*. 3rd ed. Edited by David F. Elmer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.

Mandler, Jean M., and Nancy S. Johnson. "Remembrance of Things Parsed: Story Structure and Recall." *Cognitive Psychology* 9, no. 1 (1977): 111-151. DOI: 10.1016/0010-0285(77)90006-8.

Rahmani, Bardia, Beatrice Montano, Dylan W. Groves, and Donald P. Green. "The Persuasive Effects of Narrative Entertainment: A Meta-Analysis of Recent Experiments." *Behavioural Public Policy*, First View (2025): 1-23. DOI: 10.1017/bpp.2025.10010.

Sternberg, Meir. *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

van Laer, Tom, Ko de Ruyter, Luca M. Visconti, and Martin Wetzels. "The Extended Transportation-Imagery Model: A Meta-Analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Consumers' Narrative Transportation." *Journal of Consumer Research* 40, no. 5 (2014): 797-817. DOI: 10.1086/673383.

Zwaan, Rolf A., Mark C. Langston, and Arthur C. Graesser. "The Construction of Situation Models in Narrative Comprehension: An Event-Indexing Model." *Psychological Science* 6, no. 5 (1995): 292-297. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.1995.tb00513.x.

Current professional guidance

BBC. "Editorial Guidelines: Accuracy." Current guidance checked 2 September 2026.

Society of Professional Journalists. "SPJ Code of Ethics." Revised 2014. Operative code checked 2 September 2026; a proposed 2026 replacement had not taken effect.