

Plot Structure

Although the structure of different short stories will vary, the following terms are useful in describing the various components of plot structure.

1. Orientation (Exposition)

In the orientation of a short story, the situation is established. The reader receives information about:

- a) The characters
 - *Who* is the main character of the story?
 - *Who* else is in the story?
- b) The setting
 - *When* does the story take place?
 - *Where* does the story take place?

The term 'exposition' can also be used to describe the beginning part of a story.

2. Complication (Events, Problems)

The complication is the part of a story in which the action rises. This is often referred to as the **rising action**. It is a series of events or problems that leads to a **conflict**. Conflicts can take many forms, including:

- a) Human vs human (or society)
- b) Human vs nature (or technology)
- c) Human vs God (or the supernatural)
- d) Human vs self (internal conflict)

3. Climax

The climax is the most exciting part of a story. It is the turning point.

4. Resolution (Solutions)

The resolution is the part of a story in which the action falls. This is often referred to as the **falling action**. In the resolution, the complication is resolved, i.e. the characters are able to solve their problems.

5. Coda (Lesson)

The coda is the lesson at the end of a story. Not all stories have a coda. In some stories, there is a **twist**, or an unexpected ending.

Often, a short story has a **theme**. The theme of a story is the central idea that runs through it. For example, in O. Henry's short story 'The Gift of the Magi' (sometimes titled 'The Christmas Presents'), the theme of the story is that the wisest and most meaningful gifts do not require lots of money; they are expressions of selflessness and love.