

The 90-Day Memoir

STORY-STRUCTURE QUESTIONS

In building your story, you are moving from the general to the specific. It is important to understand that you are not “plotting out” your story, but merely becoming more familiar with the key stages in your protagonist’s journey. It is through exploring your protagonist’s experiences that the plot emerges.

Write for five minutes (stream of consciousness) on each of these questions.

ACT ONE

1. Beginning: What is the mood, time, and place in which my memoir exists?
2. Dramatic Question: What is the dilemma at the heart of my memoir?
3. Inciting Incident: What event happens that sets my story into motion?
4. Opposing argument: What is the opposing argument to the Inciting Incident? Is there some kind of antagonistic response to my protagonist?
5. End of Act One: What decision does my protagonist make that they can’t go back on? Where is there reluctance in this decision?

ACT TWO

6. False Hope: Where does my protagonist experience success or false hope as the result of making their decision?

7. Midpoint: What event happens that forces my protagonist to commit fully to their goal? How does this moment involve temptation for the protagonist? They could go back to where they were in the beginning or forge into the unknown and risk losing everything.
8. Suffering: What does it look like when my protagonist realizes that this is more difficult than they had imagined? Do they consider giving up? What does it look like when they suffer? Do you see how the dilemma is becoming conscious?
9. Surrender: What does it look like when my protagonist realizes that what they wanted is impossible to achieve based on their current approach, or their current identity?

ACT THREE

10. Reality: What is the truth of my protagonist's reality that they finally accept? How does this galvanize them to take action?
11. Action: What action does my protagonist take toward getting what they need?
12. Battle Scene: What happens when my protagonist's want and need collide? What choice does my protagonist make?
13. New Equilibrium: What is the final image in my story? What does it look like when my protagonist is returned home? How are they relating differently to other characters? What have they come to understand?