

SCENE-BY-SCENE GUIDELINES

Remember: All stories run on *character* and *conflict*.

- Readers love *characters* when they feel they know them.
- Readers get to know characters when the author shows those characters actively doing things – not just thinking about doing things.
- Readers love *conflict* because conflict provides the action and gives those characters things to actively do. That way, the readers get to know the characters even better and will enjoy the story that much more.

This template can help you to plan your story, but there is still plenty of room in it for the things you want your characters to do. In any story, your imagination is the most important thing.

You can feel free to rearrange the order of these scenes, or combine some of them, if that works better for your particular story. This is demonstrated in the example that follows.

The Universal Plot Creator will simply help you make sure you have all the essential parts of any story. If you want to add additional scenes, you can do that, too!

Chapter One – Introduce the first main character and his/her external conflict.

Hook: The hook tells the reader what the story is going to be about. It gives us an example of the conflict and problems to come.

Scene One: Introduce the first of the two main characters. This can be the hero/heroine or a villain. Show this character actively doing something, so that the reader can see what sort of person they are. Your reader wants to feel that they know this character very, very well.

Scene Two: Introduce a minor character for the main one to talk to and interact with – a sidekick, a best friend, a business partner, a robot, or even a volleyball – anything that allows the character to speak out loud and not use silent internal

monologue. Show the minor character actively doing something and talking with the first main character.

Scene Three: Show the first main character's external conflict. This is a problem caused by an outside influence over which the character has no control, such as a war, an accident, a crime, a power failure, a lost letter, etc. Do not simply describe the problem; show the character actively trying to deal with it (though at this point, of course, they will not succeed.)

Chapter Two – Introduce the second main character and his/her external conflict

Scene One: Introduce the second of the two main characters. This can be the hero/heroine or a villain. Show this character actively doing something, so that the reader can see what sort of person they are. Your reader wants to feel that they know this character very, very well.

Scene Two: Introduce a minor character for the main one to talk to and interact with – a sidekick, a best friend, a business partner, a robot, or even a volleyball – anything that allows the character to speak out loud and not use silent internal monologue. Show the minor character actively doing something and talking with the second main character.

Scene Three: Show the second main character's external conflict. This is a problem caused by an outside influence over which the character has no control, such as a war, an accident, a crime, a power failure, a lost letter, etc. Do not simply describe the problem; show the character actively trying to deal with it (though at this point, of course, they will not succeed.)

Chapter Three -- The first and second main characters meet

Scene One: Show the first meeting of these characters. There should be a powerful response between them: a strong attraction if a romance, suspicion and curiosity if a mystery, fear and hatred if one of them is a villain. You may or may not include the minor characters.

Scene Two: Show a scene of strong, close dialogue between the two mains, which expands their reaction to each other and shows us what they're like when they're together.

Scene Three: Show a scene of high-powered action between the two mains, which further expands their reaction to each other. This could be a chase or fight if a crime drama, an encounter the two of them have with an alien or dragon if science fiction or fantasy, or a courtship scene or sex scene if a romance.

Chapter Four -- An internal conflict arises between the first and second main characters

This is a problem arising from the characters' own feelings – something that is personal to them, such as a class difference, a cultural difference, a value difference, wish to live in different parts of the world, etc.

Scene One: The two main characters discover the internal conflict by getting additional information – something beyond what they got in Chapter Three.

Scene Two: Show a scene of strong, close dialogue between the two mains, which expands on the internal conflict and their reaction to it.

Scene Three: Show a scene of high-powered action between the two mains, which expands on the internal conflict and their reaction to it. This could be an attempt to fit into a foreign culture, or to show the other that what they want should be changed. Of course, this only makes things worse.

Chapter Five -- The external conflict intensifies

The external conflict set up in the earlier chapters becomes more difficult to deal with and causes more distress to the main characters. They struggle to cope with the external conflict, even as the internal conflict remains unsolved.

Scene One: The external conflict becomes a direct threat to the main characters. We see the damage that it causes to them and their world.

Scene Two: The two main characters, and possibly the minor ones, escape to safety and discuss what to do. Use strong dialogue here that spells out exactly what they are up against. If one of them is the villain, it may be each other that they're up against.

Scene Three: The characters take action to solve the external conflict, but fail.

Chapter Six – The internal conflict intensifies

The internal conflict set up in the earlier chapters becomes more difficult to deal with and causes more distress to the main characters. They struggle to cope with the internal conflict, even as the external conflict remains unsolved.

Scene One: The internal conflict gets worse. We see the damage that it causes to the main characters and their personal world.

Scene Two: The main characters step back and discuss what to do, using strong dialogue that spells out exactly what they are up against. If one of them is the villain, it may be each other that they're up against.

Scene Three: The characters try to take action against the internal conflict, but fail.

Chapter Seven – The first main character tries to resolve the conflicts alone, but fails

Scene One: The first main character discusses his/her plan with one of the minor characters.

Scene Two: The first main character takes action to solve the conflicts, but fails.

Scene Three: The first main character again takes action to solve the conflicts, but again fails.

Chapter Eight – The second main character tries to resolve the conflicts alone, but fails

Scene One: The second main character discusses his/her plan with one of the minor characters.

Scene Two: The second main character takes action to solve the conflicts, but fails.

Scene Three: The second main character again takes action to solve the conflicts, but again fails.

Chapter Nine – The main characters realize that they will have to get together to solve their conflicts

Scene One: If the two main characters are lovers or allies, they will finally plan a solution that they can only accomplish together. If one of the two main characters is the villain, the two of them will plan a showdown and intend to solve the conflicts that way.

Scene Two: The two mains will make a valiant effort to solve the external conflict, but will fail.

Scene Three: The two mains will make one last valiant effort to solve the external conflict – and this time, they succeed. If one is a villain, the scene will end with the partial defeat of the villain. It is only partial because, at this point, the internal conflict has yet to be resolved.

Chapter Ten – All questions are answered and all problems are resolved to the reader's satisfaction (The internal conflict is saved for last because it is the most personal to the characters)

Scene One: The two mains will make a valiant effort to solve the internal conflict, but will fail.

Scene Two: The two mains will make one last valiant effort to solve the internal conflict – and this time, they succeed. If one is a villain, the scene will end with the death or defeat of the villain.

Scene Three: In the final scene, you can show exactly how the characters will lead their lives after the story ends. Depending on the genre of the story, you can show a wedding, a villain being led off to prison, a stolen object being returned to its rightful owner, or a seemingly vanquished monster waking up.

Sample Plot Using the Template

Romeo and Juliet

(Obviously, this is not an exact scene-for-scene breakdown of Shakespeare's play. It does show you the general progression of the story and how it would fit into this template.)

Chapter One – Introduce the first main character and his/her external conflict

Hook: The Prince of Verona breaks up a street brawl between the Montague family and the Capulet family. This is the main problem that the story will deal with: the enmity between these two families.

Scene One and Scene Two: The first main character, Romeo, is introduced. The first minor character, Romeo's cousin Benvolio, is then introduced so that Romeo has someone to talk to. We learn (through dialogue, not silent internal monologue,) that Romeo is pining for Rosaline, a woman who does not want him, but he cannot forget her.

Scene Three: Romeo and Benvolio decide to crash the Capulet's party that night because Romeo hopes to see Rosaline, even though going there is dangerous due to the family feud (Romeo's external conflict.)

Chapter Two – Introduce the second main character and his/her external conflict

Scene One, Scene Two and Scene Three: The second main character, Juliet, is introduced. The second minor character, the Nurse, is then introduced so that Juliet has someone to talk to. We learn, (through dialogue, not silent internal monologue,) that even though she is very young - only thirteen years old - Juliet's parents want her to marry Paris, a man she does not know (Juliet's external conflict.)

Chapter Three -- The first and second main characters meet

Scene One: Romeo sees Juliet at the Capulet's ball, and there is an instant and powerful attraction. The minor characters Benvolio and Mercutio are also there for him to talk to.

Scene Two and Scene Three: There is a courtship scene with wonderful dialogue between Romeo and Juliet at the ball, as well as them dancing together while knowing the risks they are taking.

Chapter Four -- An internal conflict arises between the first and second main characters

Scene One and Scene Two: Romeo climbs up Juliet's balcony and they profess their love for one another. They already knew about Romeo's external conflict – the family feud – but now it is personal to them. It has given rise to an internal conflict for them both: falling in love with someone from an enemy family.

Scene Three: In an attempt to resolve the internal conflict, Romeo and Juliet persuade Friar Lawrence to marry them. If they are married, their families cannot separate them.

Chapter Five -- The external conflict intensifies

Scene One: Because of the family enmity, Juliet's cousin Tybalt challenges Romeo to a duel but Romeo ends up killing Tybalt.

Scene Two and Scene Three: Romeo flees to Friar Lawrence's cell, but ends up banished for his crime. In addition, the family feud (Romeo's external conflict) has just become far worse due to the killing, and the question of Juliet's marrying Paris (Juliet's external conflict) has just become far worse since she has disobeyed her parents and cannot marry anyone now.

Chapter Six – The internal conflict intensifies

Scene One and Scene Two: Now Romeo has just killed his wife's kinsman, and it is uncertain whether Juliet will stay with him. She must search her conscience and her heart and decide what to do.

Scene Three: In an attempt to circumvent the internal conflict, the secondary characters of the Nurse and Friar Lawrence help Romeo and Juliet spend their wedding night together, but this is only a temporary answer.

Chapter Seven – The first main character tries to resolve the conflicts alone, but fails

Scene One, Scene Two and Scene Three: Romeo agrees with Friar Lawrence that he should accept his banishment and go alone to Mantua, so that the anger over the murder can cool down. He takes the Friar's advice to simply wait in Mantua while the Friar attempts to settle the family conflict and make it safe for Romeo to return. Of course, all of this fails to help anything.

Chapter Eight – The second main character tries to resolve the conflicts alone, but fails

(Scene Two): Juliet is informed by her mother and the Nurse that she is to marry Paris in just a few days. She resists their plan, but to no avail.

(Scene One): Juliet goes to Friar Lawrence for help, and they devise a very dangerous plan where she will drink a potion that will make her appear dead. She can then awaken in the Capulet family vault and find Romeo there waiting for her.

Scene Three: With Juliet's approval, the Friar attempts to send a message to Romeo about the plan but the message fails to reach him.

Chapter Nine – The main characters realize that they will have to get together to solve their conflicts

Scene One: Juliet drinks the potion and appears to be dead.

Scene Two: Romeo's servant Balthasar hears the news of Juliet's death, believes it, and rushes tell Romeo.

Scene Three: Romeo realizes he cannot stay in Mantua and races back to Verona to be with Juliet, even if she is dead. He has overcome the external conflict (the family feud) in the sense that it no longer dictates his actions and he refuses to be separated from Juliet any longer.

Chapter Ten – All questions are answered and all problems are resolved to the reader's satisfaction (The internal conflict is saved for last because it is the most personal to the characters)

Scene One: Romeo reaches the Capulet tomb and finds Juliet there, apparently dead. In order to overcome his separation from Juliet in life (his internal conflict,) Romeo takes his own life.

Scene Two: Juliet awakes in the tomb and finds Romeo truly dead. In order to overcome her separation from Romeo in life (her internal conflict,) Juliet takes her own life – and succeeds this time. The two have now overcome the conflicts by choosing death over a lifetime of separation caused by a family feud.

Scene Three: Because *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy, the story ends with the funeral of the two main characters. But their deaths also result in the end of the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets, so at least the citizens will be able to live in peace in fair Verona.