

I THE LEAD OR COMPLICATING FOCUS

The first focus is called the lead or complicating focus and has to accomplish a number of things. There should be an inciting incident—an event that has significance for the character because it disturbs the character's normal world. This disturbance arouses both a conscious and an unconscious desire to restore balance, launching the character on a quest toward a goal.

Inciting Incident:

- Primary cause for all that follows.
- The hook.
- Must be concrete, not vague.
- Must happen on-screen if in a screenplay; if in fiction, it can happen in backstory but the protagonist must react in the foreground.
- Must upset the balance of forces in the ordinary world.

Object of Desire: something concrete and specific that, if achieved, would restore order.

Conscious Desire: caused by the inciting incident; this desire is known to the protagonist and drives the protagonist on a quest toward a Goal or Object of Desire.

Unconscious or Contradictory Desire: also caused by the inciting incident, this hidden or unspoken desire may or may not be known to the protagonist, but it creates an opposing force that causes internal conflict.

Quest or Spine of Story: journey taken by a protagonist with a desire pursuing a Goal or Object of Desire in order to restore balance. The story spine or quest organizes all scenes and images and illustrates the causal connections between events and desires. The conscious desire motivates most of the events, at least early on; progress is interrupted or undermined by appearances of the unconscious desire.

II THE HISTORY FOCUS

This focus either establishes the background of the situation, or takes the action through the first attempt to reach the object of desire, or a combination of both. As the action moves forward, the writer takes advantage of a time with low-risk opposition to slip in history. Readers learn backstory—information from the past that has to be known to understand the current situation. The tension is low at this point of the story because events do not have that much significance and the risks are still low for the character. An author can use this focus to show what lies underneath the surface of the character's normal world.

III THE DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS

Focus three is the main developmental focus, also known as the middle of the story. This is where most of the story action takes place, risk increases and the dramatic action escalates toward a turning point. A series of action/reaction sequences march the story to ever-increasing levels of risk for the main character, culminating at the high point of the dramatic action, also known as the point of no return. With each increased exposure to risk, the main character is stripped of resources that he or she brought with them into the quest from their ordinary world. The turning point is the point of maximum exposure and the point at which usually all vital resources but one have been stripped away. In focus III, the story relies less and less on backstory the closer it moves to the point of no return. This focus takes the story to its emotional high point.

Point of No Return:

- High point of the action.
- Point of maximum exposure.
- Arises right before crisis moment.
- Point at which it is impossible to return to the ground situation.

IV THE CRISIS FOCUS

In the fourth focus everything that was set in motion culminates in a dilemma. This is usually a stop-action moment in the story (and if possible a pre-stand-off between the two main characters). The dilemma is caused by the conscious and unconscious desires both coming to the surface and requiring equal attention. Because of events just preceding the crisis moment, the character arrives at an insight moment. This insight pushes the character to make one final choice that then pushes past the dilemma toward a final action.

V THE CLIMAX FOCUS

The fifth focus is the climax. One final action is committed by the main character, who then either succeeds in achieving the goal or fails to do the same. Either way, the function of Focus V is to bring the character to a reversal, a new situation in which the character is profoundly changed from how they were in the situation that opened the story. That concludes your task. Good luck.

To see a well-crafted literary example of the five-focus plot structure, check out this amazing novel *Better You Go Home* by Scott Driscoll. www.scott-driscoll.com (Coffeetown Press, 2013)

