

The Golden Rules for a Good Plot

1. Create a plot skeleton

A [plot outline](#) will help you choose a complication and the steps to resolve it. This is the plot. Your character must want or need something and be prevented from getting it. This is the complication. How do they get it? This is the story. Once your character figures out how to get what they want, well, there's your plot. Remember, outlining your plot in advance won't limit your creativity, but rather ensures a good plot—one that doesn't stray too far off topic.

2. Flesh out your plot

Fleshing out your [plot](#) with colorful characters and a vivid setting will enhance your novel and grab your readers' attention. Be sure to spend time on the little details and stay focused; nothing is worse than a good plot idea that grows ever more chaotic as the novel progresses. Stories are about change; each scene should have a turning point, with the character moving from one value to another. Does the character start out sad? They should end up angry, or happy, or downright ebullient. Each scene should push the story toward a final turning point: the resolution.

3. Bring your plot to a powerful resolution

Have you used each scene and story event to guide readers to a [plot resolution](#)? Now don't let them down. This is your final turning point; how has your character changed from the beginning of the story? Readers don't want to spend an entire day, or even a week, reading a novel just to have the ending fall flat. Be sure to tie up loose ends. Even if you're writing a book series with an overarching plot, you still have to end the mini-plots within each book.

4. End your story at a natural stopping place

After the climax, wrap up the story as quickly as possible. Don't be tempted to drag it out; your readers won't like it and your plot and characters will suffer. Remember, the end of the story will be the freshest thing in readers' minds once they put the book down.

5. Make sure your characters resolve conflicts on their own

Don't rely on an act of nature or an unknown hero to clean things up at the last minute. Your audience wants to see your [characters](#) solve their own problems. Your readers have grown attached to your characters; a good plot will show how these characters have been transformed by the obstacles they've faced.