

#1: Theme

The Theme is the lesson the reader learns from living the story through the eyes of the protagonist. Example: The Grinch. There is more to Christmas than gifts. You should be able to write down the theme of your work. The theme of a story is always tied to the protagonist's internal conflict.

#2: Interior and Exterior Conflict

Ext. Conflict → Compels hero to face → Int. Conflict

- The protagonist begins the story with an interior conflict. The resolution of this conflict—or lack of—conveys the theme of the story.
- Every event in the external conflict must impact the protagonist's internal struggle. Example: Each of the three ghosts who haunted Scrooge forced him to examine his meaningless, miserable life.
- The exterior conflict must be overwhelming because the protagonist will not willingly face his/her own interior struggle. Think dragons or robots from the future, not misunderstandings.
- If an event does not touch upon the protagonist's interior struggle the reader will STOP reading.

#3: Show Don't Tell

- Reveal the story—and emotion—through action. Show what each character is doing.

She banged her head against the door. Not: she was frustrated.

He strolled along, lifting his chin, feeling the warmth of the sun on his face. Not: He walked slowly.
- Remember: writing “She thought” or “He thought” is telling.

#4: Pacing

(from *Save the Cat! Writes a Novel*)

1%	Opening Image (Act I)
5%	Theme Stated
10%	Catalyst
20%	Upside-down world (Act II)
50%	Midpoint (stakes go up!)
50-70%	Bad guys close in
75%	All is lost
80%	Dark night of the soul
80+%	Breakthrough (Act III)
80-99%	Finale
100%	Final Image (Dénouement)

(% indicates location in the novel. For a 120-page novel, 20% is p.24)

#5: Other Stuff

- Use all five senses. Smell is the most powerful. Use it to evoke memories, to scare, to warn, to indicate joy or bliss, to convey the extraordinary.
- Use juicy words.

FICTION ESSENTIALS