

An Explanation of Conflict and Plot



EXTERNAL CONFLICT occurs *outside* the character's mind and is beyond his control. Examples are god-made crises, the unknown, society, murder, espionage, robbery, stalkers, rivalry, competitions, other characters, and so on. *External conflict* can cause *internal conflict*.

INTERNAL CONFLICT occurs *inside* a character's mind, such as jealousy, envy, love, anger, hurt, fear, insecurity, phobias, rejection, etc. Characters can control how they deal with conflict, whether internal or external. *Internal conflict* can cause *external conflict*.

Internal reaction to external condition is called "cause and effect," because as characters face or flee conflict, they act and react. These actions and reactions develop plot. Both internal and external conflicts are equally crucial to fiction no matter the genre or length. A writer must also heighten and maintain pace until the final climax and story resolution. Try this simple outline to assure pacing:

- **EXPOSITION:** The beginning of the story introducing main character, the setting, and establishing point-of-view.
- **OPENING:** Character's first confrontation with conflict, whether internal or external.
- **INCIDENT:** Confrontation with an external conflict causes an internal conflict. Example: (character's stubbornness) which causes more external conflict (wife's anger).
- **RISING:** Internal conflict increases (Should character go with his family or stay) because of external conflict (forest fire is getting closer and closer).
- **ACTION:** Character stays behind to face danger and deals with fear (internal conflict), confusion (internal conflict), debating firefighters that are trying to force him to evacuate (external conflict), and worrying (internal conflict) about his wife's anger (external conflict).
- **CLIMAX:** Fire is perilously close (external conflict). Intense heat singes the air, fire crackles. Main character realizes that losing his life and his family is not worth saving wood, brick, and mortar (internal resolution to external condition).
- **FALLING:** Barely makes it to safety and from a distance watches fire consume the area where his home is.
- **RESOLUTION:** Main character reconciles with family.