REDLINE & PAGE · EDITORIAL STUDIO

MARGIN NOTES

a fiction writer's companion



READ. WRITE. REVISE.

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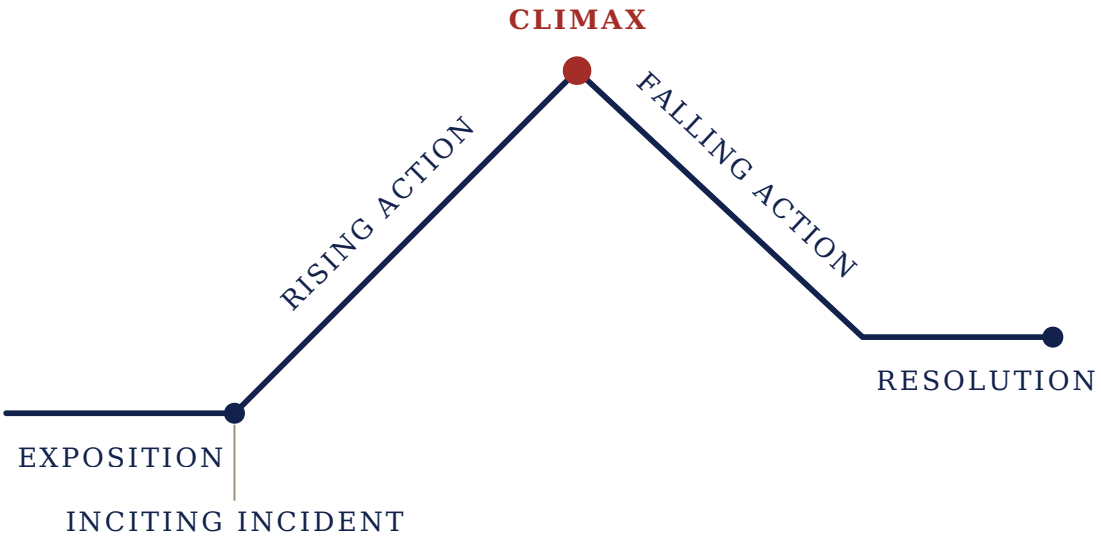
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None of this is a rulebook—every working story breaks a few of these on purpose. Reach for whatever helps: a way to name what isn't working yet, a nudge past a stuck scene, or a fresh angle when your thinking feels tangled.

Story Structure & Plot

The shape underneath almost every story, and what actually keeps it moving



Freytag's Pyramid—the shape underneath almost every story

¶ *The shape every story takes*

Story structure has a name—Freytag's Pyramid—and once you can see it, you'll notice it everywhere. A story opens in a kind of ordinary equilibrium, gets knocked off balance by an inciting incident, climbs through rising action as one problem creates the next, peaks at a climax, and eases back down through falling action to a new, changed equilibrium. Knowing the shape won't write the story for you, but it will tell you which leg of the climb you're on, and what that leg is asking of you.

¶ *What a first line has to do*

A first line has one job: make the reader want the second line. It doesn't have to summarize your book, hint at your theme, or be the best sentence you'll ever write. A narrator with a strong, specific way of talking can hook a reader on its own. So can a strange detail dropped into an ordinary moment, or a question the reader can't stand not knowing the answer to. What can lose a reader is clearing your throat first—laying out scenery or backstory before anything has begun to pull them forward. Open as close as you can to the moment something changes, and trust the reader to follow you into the explanation later.

¶ *What actually sets a story in motion*

The event that breaks a character's ordinary life open almost always arrives from outside them—a knock at the door, a letter, a stranger with news. But don't mistake that event for the story itself. A character isn't a marble simply rolling in whatever direction it's pushed; the real story is what they choose to do next, whether they open the door, read the letter, trust the stranger. The incident is only the spark. Their response is the fire.

¶ *Let one problem create the next*

Rising action earns its name because trouble keeps compounding—not through one unrelated disaster after another, but because solving today's problem quietly creates tomorrow's. Open one door and there's a hallway to deal with. Sometimes it's simpler than that: a long journey is trouble enough on its own, since distance and time have a way of turning up obstacles you didn't plan for. Either way, resist writing rising action as a checklist of dangers. Each should grow out of the one before it.