Story Writing: Help & Guide Infosheet

To help you begin the writing process, consider the following five steps:

Step 1: **PLAN** Select a plot structure system (Three-Act Structure, Hero's Journey) to help guide your story.

Step 2: **CHARACTERS** Choose your protagonist and antagonist. The antagonist does not have to be a villain, and could be an aspect of the protagonist's personality or even the environment.

Step 3: **SETTING** Choose the location your story will take place (Our world? Another world?) & the time (Past? Present? Future?).

Step 4: **THEME** Is there a central theme or symbolism for the story? Do you have a message you want to transmit through your story?

Step 5: **CONFLICT** What is/are the main problem(s) that the main character(s) need to overcome? A conflict is almost always necessary for a story to have momentum for characters to change and grow.

General Tips & Advice:

-   Start late in the story.If you are writing a story about someone about to die from an alligator attack in a wedding in Florida, you don't have time to show the ceremony, or the flight to Florida; start right before the climax of the story, or even better, right in the middle of it!
-   Don't bother with unnecessary background information or details. Focus on the exact specifics of the path your character is on, without worrying about describing extra details. If you want to write a longer story (i.e. one page instead of ~300~500 words), then it is okay to give extra details.
-   Choose the right details. You are painting a picture with your words. What do you want the reader to picture in their head? Direct the thoughts of the reader as if you were a music conductor.

Three-Act Structure
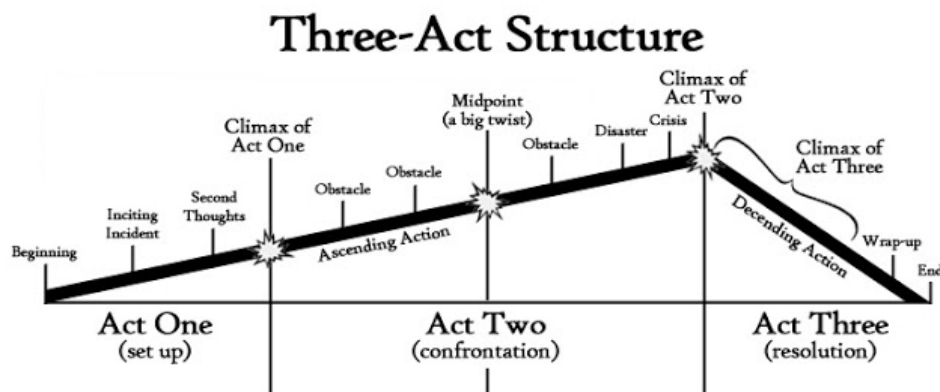
PLOT STRUCTURE [1] - The 3-Act Structure

The three-act structure is a standard method of organizing a story, including books, TV/movies, and even webcomics. As its name implies, there are 3 parts to it, or "acts", and the plot unfolds in a particular order:

ACT I: Set-up [Introduces the reader to the world; sets the coming conflict; ¼ of entire story]	
Beginning	Introduce the main characters & setting.
Inciting Incident	An initial disturbance, or conflict, that sets your protagonist onto the story's path.
Second Thoughts	Protagonist learns what they must do, but chooses not to pursue it. This reveals something about their character.
Climax	Ends the first act, and starts the events of act 2. The protagonist makes a choice to follow the path he rejected before.
ACT II: Confrontation [Main part of story; many struggles and complications; ½ of entire story]	
Ascending Action: (subplot/obstacle/resolution)	Meet new characters. This is also where subplots can start (minor plots for minor characters) and where obstacles are presented to the reader and overcome.
First Culmination/Midpoint	The middle of the story, also called the "big twist". The characters are at a very low point here; something terrible happens to the characters. This event usually is usually followed by more *ascending action*.
Disaster & Crisis	"False sense of victory". The characters think they have won, but they haven't. They learn more about the antagonist.
Climax	A direct result of the *disaster & crisis*: protagonist wants to give up, but keeps going.
ACT III: Resolution [Final part of story; final & largest climax of the story; ¼ of entire story]	
Descending Action More subplot/obstacle/resolution	The main characters create a final plan to beat the antagonist and win the day, overcoming any obstacles in the way of the plan.
Climax	The final climax of the entire story. This is usually the moment of highest tension, and with the most stakes: win or lose! Usually, the main characters/protagonist wins.
Denouement/wrap-up	Provides a sense of closure to the story, an emotional de-escalation following the events of the climax.

EXAMPLE: IRON MAN 1

Here is an example BREAKDOWN of a famous movie, the original *Iron Man*, using this 3-act structure. Since the movie was created with the 3-act structure in mind, it follows the formula exactly:

ACT I: Set-up [Introduces the reader to the world; sets the coming conflict; ¼ of entire story]	
Beginning	Tony Stark is an asshole billionaire philanthropist, CEO of a weapons manufacturer selling weapons.
Inciting Incident	A group of terrorists kidnap Tony Stark and hold him for ransom.
Second Thoughts	His captors want him to make a weapon, but he refuses. With the help of Yinsen, Tony builds a prototype Iron Man suit instead.
Climax	Tony Stark escapes the compound, Yinsen dies.
ACT II: Confrontation [Main part of story; many struggles and complications; ½ of entire story]	
Ascending Action: (subplot/obstacle/resolution)	Tony returns to the world and meets everyone who thought he was dead. Tony wants to stop making weapons, his partner, Obadiah Stane, is unhappy. Tony begins to make his Iron Man Suit with the begrudging help of his love interest, Pepper Potts.
First Culmination/Midpoint	Tony almost dies as he tries to fly too high with his suit. The audience learns that Stane ordered Tony's kidnapping & death.
Disaster & Crisis	Tony finds out that Stane has been keeping him locked out of the board of directors at his company. Tony also finds out that his weapons continue to be sold abroad.
Climax	Tony flies to Afghanistan to stop the weapons from being used; almost gets caught by the air force. His friend, Rhodey, saves him.
ACT III: Resolution	
Descending Action More subplot/obstacle/resolution	Audience learns that Stane is making his own Iron Man suit and trying to duplicate the arc reactor technology.
Climax	Tony and Pepper learn of Stane's betrayal. They try to stop him, but he and Tony have a huge battle in mech suits.
Denouement/wrap-up	Stane is defeated, Pepper is saved, Tony gets his company, announces he is Iron Man.

On the next page will be an empty sheet for you to try and fill in yourself as you plan your story.
There are other plot structures to consider before you begin, however, so read on!

Student Worksheet: 3-Act Structure

ACT I: Set-up	
Beginning	
Inciting Incident	
Second Thoughts	
Climax	

ACT II: Confrontation	
Ascending Action: (subplot/obstacle/resolution)	
First Culmination/Midpoint	
Disaster & Crisis	
Climax	

ACT III: Resolution	
Descending Action More subplot/obstacle/resolution	
Climax	
Denouement/wrap-up	