



Before you start writing, read these tips for creating engaging plots:

1. *Let characters influence the plot.*

Characters develop out of the situation for a story. Think about the characters in a particular situation, and plot ideas will emerge. Suspense author Andre Jute says, "Plot flows most easily and genuinely from character . . . and the actions characters undertake because of the relationships they have and the frictions built into such contact. On the other hand, if you first work out the plot and then simply people it with characters who can carry out the actions you've dreamed up, your characters will seem wooden and unreal."

2. *Avoid too much plot.*

Don't create a crisis every two pages, too many characters and story lines, characters that are "in action" so much they do not have time to think, etc. Many writers go back through a first draft and look for story lines, characters, and plot events they can cut to improve the story's focus on the theme.

3. *Know when to start the story.*

The action of your story should begin at the point at which the characters start moving toward the end of it. For example, a story about a family coping with the breakup of the parents' marriage might begin on the day one parent moves out.

4. *Let readers wait.*

Anticipation is part of the fun for readers. Readers get involved because they want to know what happens to the characters. If you answer that question too soon, you may have to dream up another plot to finish the story.

5. *Pace the plot.*

Think of your plot as having a kind of wave motion: with ups and downs, action sequences and calm scenes (sitting, talking, thinking, etc.), and tension that builds up, comes to a crest, and then settles down. This kind of pacing sets your reader up for the final climax.

6. *Let your characters grow.*

In most stories, plot is about how life affects people or characters. Between the beginning and the end of your story, your main characters should learn, grow, and be in some way affected by the events they have just lived through.