

Plotting for Pantsers

A Bare-Bones Novel Outlining Template



Act One

What is “normal life” for your protagonist at the beginning of your novel? (You don’t have to describe all of it; just focus on the aspect of “normal” that is about to change.)

What does your protagonist think they need?

What do they actually need?

Describe the inciting incident. What event forces the protagonist to take action that guides them away from their “normal”?

Act Two

What motivates your protagonist? What goal are they trying to achieve?

Who or what is keeping your protagonist from reaching their goal?

What are your protagonist's go-to strategies for pursuing their goal? How do these strategies reflect a stubborn commitment to old beliefs or attitudes?

What wounds, flaws, and weaknesses will you reveal about your protagonist?

What's the midpoint reversal?

What event finally brings your protagonist to their knees?

Act Three

How has your protagonist changed internally?

What bold action do they take as a result of that change?

What is the payoff for their change . . . or the consequence of refusing to change despite what they've learned?