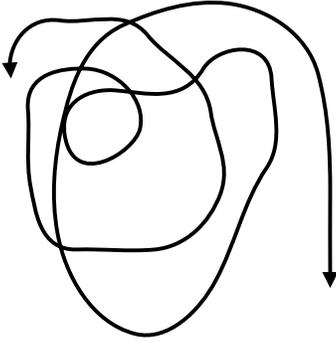


MAPN Writer's Workshop

Most of the time, the creative process can be confusing. Sometimes, we can start a narrative with an idea of where we're headed, but we can lose our way. We can go forward, or backward. We can make weird turns, or lose the point altogether. Nothing is wasted though, because every bend in the process is helping you to arrive at your goal. Every sentence you change, you get closer and closer to what you intend.



In this handout, we'll discuss some ways that structure can inform how you think about writing.

Narrative Structure

Narrative structure is the natural starting place its a natural structure for storytelling. We instinctively put our lives into a neat moment-by-moment order. Beware, though. The point of writing is to show, not tell. Chronological writing can be boring—first this, then this, then this. If unrelieved, it becomes the ticking clock in the jail or, worse, the flat line of death.



Savvy writers twist their chronology, beginning at the end or breaking to a moment in the past, even weaving together several timelines.

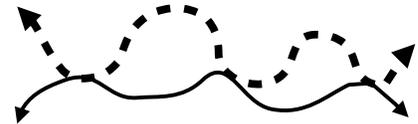
More crucial, though, is their use of tension, which changes the flat line of chronology into a rising line—a plot. Such tension forces the reader into a climb, muscles contracting. It raises anticipation. Will we reach the top? And what will we see from there?



Narrative essays keep us engaged because we want answers to such questions. The tension begs for resolution. We keep on reading unless the writer stops stair-stepping upward toward the critical moment when change becomes necessary. If she flatlines then we are likely to lose interest and walk away.

Braided Structures

Many narratives are braided, weaving together two or more strands of story line in an interactive fashion. For example, discussing technical terms of basketball in one thread, and then writing narrative scene in the other.



Note on Beginnings and Endings

Regardless of structure, all narratives must end But how?

Endings are related to beginnings. That's why many essays seem to circle back to where they began. But for a conclusion to feel truly satisfying, it must be like life, which is never completely complete. In real life, there is always an "and then," so the best conclusions don't moralize, or say "This is what I learned."

The best conclusions end in scene, or show us an image. The best conclusions leave is with a hint of what is at stake, or shows us something more about being human.