

Plot Problems and Solution Table

Based on and Expanded from: *Creating Short Fiction* by Damon Knight ©1985

Problem	Symptoms	Diagnosis	Solutions
No Central Plot	Storyline wanders, story pointless, climaxes weak or repetitive, characters lack believable motivations.	Author lacks direction and did not actually plot out the story.	Increase central conflict for main character, provide matching motivation and rewrite from scratch.
Story is Confusing	Too many characters, too much action, lack of follow-through.	Author lost focus.	Reduce number of character to 3-4, replot and then rewrite.
Good plot but reader doesn't care	Story pointless, characters boring, cardboard or respond inappropriately.	Author misses point of characterization. If we don't care about the characters, the story always fails.	This is not really a plot problem but a characterization one. Need interesting people, with complex conflicts and strong motivations.
Bad, disappointing ending	Didn't keep promise to reader from opening pages, ending too obvious or violates characters' motivations.	Author has no ending (i.e. painted self into metaphorical corner which is a plot issue or simply doesn't know the ending yet) or climax occurs off-stage.	Go back to the beginning to define and refine the initial promise and replot taking care to not drop the threads along the way and having climax on-stage.