**Structuring Your Novel by K.M. Weiland**

**PART 1: Story Structure**

**Ch1 The Hook**

1. Hooks should be inherent to the plot
2. Hooks don’t always involve action, but they always set it up.
3. Hooks never waste time.
4. Hooks almost always pull double or triple duty in introducing character, conflict, and plot - and even setting and theme.

**Ch2 Where Should You Begin**

With character, action, and setting. Which event is the first domino in your row of dominoes? Don’t start too soon, don’t go heavy on backstory. Your opening asks a specific question, and that question needs to be answered by the end, so double check that that happens, and redo/reevaluate your beginning if not.

* Character: Stories are about people. Give readers a reason to care.
* Action: Static characters are boring. When the scene opens, your character should be exhibiting a characteristic moment. This moment should show the character performing an action that’ll figure prominently later in the plot and illustrate a key point in their personality.
* Setting: Grounds readers and their actions and shapes the plot. Be careful with *In Media’s Res*, beginning a story in the middle, it doesn’t always work. Don’t go super heavy on setting/descriptions.

**Ch3 Opening Chapter Pitfalls**

* Prologues, dream sequences, flash forwards.
* How to handle backstory - it MUST MATTER, in that it moves the plot forward or reveals something. Artfully placed in the story. Flashbacks help streamline backstory.

**Ch4 The First Act, Pt 1: Introducing Characters**

* First discover your character. You need to know them to portray them on the page accurately. You need to know their personality points, motivations, and beliefs.
* Which characters should be introduced? Protagonist, Antagonist, love interest, sidekick, and mentor.
* Too many characters may confuse your reader. Cut them if they serve no purpose or combine them if they serve a similar purpose. One trick for differentiating them is giving all the names a different starting letter.

**Ch5 The First Act, PT 2: Introducing Stakes and Settings**

* As your character walks on the page, they should bring the stakes with them; what they care about and the threat to that.
* Whatever the ‘worst’ thing is that can happen to your character, it needs to happen in the first act. Set it up now, so the reader knows and understands ‘what’s at stake’ later. Take time to develop this stake.
* Settings. Think on what type of settings the plot will require and use as few as necessary. Your setting can add depth to your scene, heighten the tension, and even lead to unanticipated story angles.
* Settings can be concrete or throw away. Concrete settings are dictated by scenes that must take place in a specific locale, whereas throwaway settings are not confined by the needs of the scene.
* Use your character’s personal surroundings to give a glimpse into who they are. Readers care less for the details in how things look than they do about how it feels to experience them. Use all the senses and specific details. Don’t cut corners in the belief that they’ve been where your setting is or that they’ll fill in the blanks.

The first quarter of your book lays the foundation for your entire story. Every scene should lead to the next and on to the first plot point. Set up all the necessary playing pieces, so you can ground your reader and grip them with the need to keep reading.

**Ch6 The First Plot Point**

* Events up until the First Plot Point happen to your MC, but the First Plot Point is when the MC reacts to the event, something that’s a point of no return. Something changes, either the physical setting or the cast of supporting characters.
* The Inciting Incident sets the story in motion while the Key Incident is what the story is about and draws the main character into the story line. The Key Event is the moment when the character becomes engaged by the Inciting Event. Each Event can go anywhere in the first act, but need to happen before the First Plot Point, and they need to go in order of Inciting and then Key. Sometimes the Inciting Event can happen before the beginning chapter.

**Ch7 The First Half of the Second Act**

* The First Half - your characters find the time and space to react to the First Plot Point. The MC is trying to take action but they’re really a response to the First Plot Point. They act, the antag force responds, the MC acts again, and so on until the Midpoint. Their reactions must be dominoes, moving the plot forward and deepening the weave of scenes, subplots, and themes. This section is where the character will gain the skills or items necessary for their final battle in the 3rd Act. This is where you deepen your character development and foreshadowing of important elements.
* The First Pinch Point - toward the end of the first half of the second act, around the ⅜ mark, the antag flexes their muscles, this serves to set up the protag’s change of tactics at the midpoint. It raises the stakes and foreshadows the climax. Its focus is the central conflict rather than a subplot.
* The Midpoint - 2nd Major Plot Point around the 50% mark, caps your reactions and sets up the chain of actions that’ll lead your characters into the Third Act. It’s like a 2nd Inciting Incident that influences the plot. The MC starts to take charge of the story and acts out against the antag, (it’s their personal catalyst). It has to be the logical outcome of the previous scenes but should be dramatically new and different from anything that's come before.

**Ch8 The Second Half of the Second Act**

* Begins with strong action from the character. They’re realizing their full power and stretching their wings to discover what they can do with that power. Your MC sees things/themselves, more clearly after the Midpoint. Their actions can be as much a period of inner revelation as actual aggression against the antag, and sometimes their attack is nothing more than a complete and deliberate ignoring of the antag.
* This is your last chance to get all the playing pieces into position. Some problems will resolve, but the major inner and outer problems will remain through the Third Act. This is a moment for your character’s inner transformation and their relationship with other key characters.
* Your character’s arc of personal growth is what drives the story, don’t let it stagnate or happen too quickly. Don’t let them react to similar situations the same way over and over. Prep them for their final battle and foreshadow the inner demons they’ll have to face.
* The Second Pinch Point - Occurs half-way through, around the 5/8th mark, this scene showcases the antag. Ramps up stakes and foreshadows the final battle. Examples can be a turning of the tables, bitter argument, demonstration of authority, renewed pursuit, etc.
* Subplots - natural offshoots of the plot itself, that are so integral you can’t extricate it. They’re introduced within the first half of the book and come to full flower in the second act. They’ll either tie off their loose ends or domino into the main plot for the climax. This allows contrast within the plot and allow us to introduce character depth via situations that would be off-limits in the main part of the plot. Without subplots you might end up with a short 1-dimensional book.

**Ch9 The Third Act**

* Between the 70-75% mark. This section is the point of your story. Subplots are tied off, foreshadows are fulfilled, protag and antag play the final pieces of their plans, antag faces their inner demons and completes their arc.
* The Third Plot Point - the thing your MC wants is within reach, only to be dashed away and crushing your MC to their lowest low, from which they’ll rise in the climax.
* Fulfilling Your Character’s Arc - The MC’s back is against the wall and there’s nothing left but to face the antag. They have to face every last one of their weaknesses and mistakes. They have to be broken by them and then rise. They put all their cards on the table - their story-long goal and inner need - b/c if they don’t win now, they never will. You’ll force your character into a do or die. The reason they’ve failed up til now is because they haven’t faced their deepest fear or doubt and it’s holding them back from transforming into a new person. They take a stand mentally and emotionally and decide facing the antag is worth sacrificing themselves to their fear, which proves their new view of themselves and life.

**Ch10 The Climax**

* The last 10% of the book, though some may have false climaxes, where the MC thinks they’ve ended it, but they haven’t addressed the true obstacle standing between them and their goal. Ends before the last 1-2 scenes.
* Perfect endings have inevitability and unexpectedness, which are given through foreshadowing and complications. Don’t throw in things to wrap up your story that haven’t been mentioned before.
* The Climax is when the protag and antag clash. It can be a physical battle or a simple admission, but it’s a moment of revelation for the MC. The epiphany can come before, during, or after the Climax. The MC will then act on that, capping the change in their arc and ending the primary conflict, either physically or spiritually, or both.
* Shortening the scenes and chapters speeds up the pacing and increases the urgency. However, don’t make it melodramatic and don’t force it.

**Ch11 The Resolution**

* Where you and the reader say goodbye to the characters. They get to see them relaxing and living after the climax and see how they’ve changed. Shorter is better, and you don’t have to tie up every loose end - you can let the reader fill in the rest of the story.
* The memorability of closing lines isn’t as important as the memorability of the feeling with which they leave the reader. Strike an emotional note that resonates with the tone of the book and leaves readers satisfied. Some factors to consider - Summation, Theme, Pacing, Farewell, and Continuation.

**Ch12 Further Considerations for Your Ending**

* Plan for more than one ending, look past the obvious, run it by test audiences, and set it aside until you gain objectivity.
* Happy or Sad Ending? If your character dies, make the death matter. Foreshadow their demise. End on an affirming note.
* How not to end your story: Killing your climax with deus ex machina. Abandoning your character in the climax. Lying to readers with trick endings. Avoiding resolution through cliffhangers. Watering down the denouement with epilogues.

**Ch13 FAQs about Story Structure**

**PART 2: Scene Structure**

**Ch14 The Scene**

**Ch15 Options for Goals in a Scene**

**Ch16 Options for Conflict in a Scene**

**Ch17 Options for Disasters in a Scene**

**Ch18 The Sequel**

**Ch19 Options for Reactions in a Sequel**

**Ch20 Options for Dilemmas in a Sequel**

**Ch21 Options for Decisions in a Sequel**

**Ch22 Variations on Scene Structure**

**Ch23 FAQs about Scene Structure**

**PART 3: Sentence Structure**

**Ch24 Sentence Structure**