Storytelling: Narrative structures

Genres

1) Narration

Narration is a literary format that uses written or spoken commentary to convey the story to an audience. Narration involves a set of techniques by which the creator presents the story. These techniques include:

a) Narrative voice: the perspective through which the story is told (first person, second person, and third person).

b) Narrative time: time frame of a story in the past, present, or future.

c) Narrative type:

- *"**Linear narrative:** presents the events of the story in the order in which they actually happened.*

- ***Non-linear narrative presents** the events of the story out of order, employing flashbacks and other literary devices to shift the chronology of a story.*

- ***Quest narrative** is a story in which the protagonist works tirelessly toward a goal. The pursuit of this goal likely becomes their all-consuming passion, and they must face seemingly insurmountable obstacles along the way.*

- ***Viewpoint narrative** is designed to express the points of view or subjective personal experience of the main character or other fictional characters in the story."*[1]

The narrator is a personal character or impersonal voice that the creator (author) of the story developed to inform the audience about the story. The narrator may be: an anonymous, impersonal, or independent entity with some relation to the story; author as a character; or any other character directly appearing and participating in the story, whether fictional or factual. Narrators are considered participants if they are characters in the story and non-participants if they merely connect with the story and engage in a plot.

2) Narrative structure – basics

According to **Aristotle**, a tragedy, which is one type of a plot, can be divided into three stages: a beginning, a middle, and an end. He elaborated this concept in his work called Poetics and stated that the *"tragedy should imitate a whole action, which means that the events follow each other by probability or necessity, and that the causal chain has a beginning and an end."*[2]

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[1] MasterClass staff (November 8, 2020), 4 Types of Narrative Writing, MasterClass, Retrieved from:
https://www.masterclass.com/articles/types-of-narrative-writing#4-types-of-narrative-writing

[2] Aristotle, Poetics, The Project Gutenberg Ebook produced by An Anonymous Volunteer and David Widger, The Project Gutenberg, Retrieved from: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm#link2H_4_0009

Gustav Freytag (German novelist and playwright) derived a model consisting of 5 parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, catastrophe (denouement).

- Exposition is the beginning of the story, where the setting and main characters are introduced.

- Rising action is elaborating the story's conflict on the way to climax. The characters are meeting their antagonists or issues they will need to solve. This part of the story can also reveal some background information.

- Climax is one of the main turning points in the story. The main conflict culminates and characters know their life will not be the same as it was before. It's often followed by a calmer part of the story, so that both characters and audience can have a rest and absorb all emotions.

- Falling action – the story continues and characters need to deal with events that happened during the climax. How do they react to it? What will be new challenges? How will the central theme/conflict continue? These are the main questions that need to be answered during falling action.

- Catastrophe is the end of the story, the conflict is resolved in a good or bad way. The ending can also be open and leaves the doors open for the audience's fantasy or potential follow-up stories.
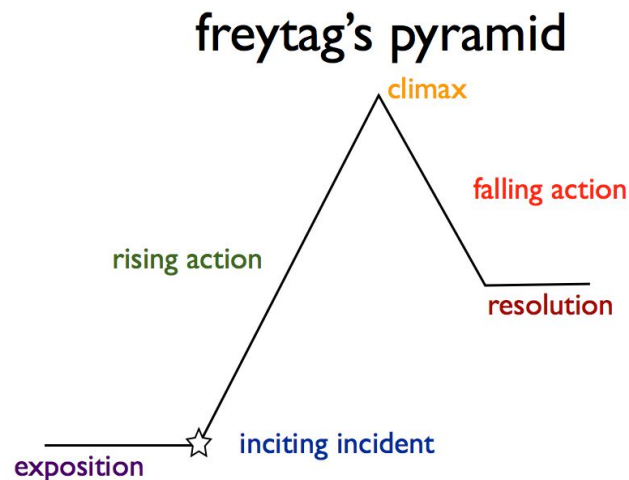
Source of the picture: https://writers.com/freytags-pyramid#gallery[3]

Syd Field (American author of books on screenwriting) introduced the paradigm of the story structure, which is based on Aristotle's framework, but adjusted for film. It consists of three acts: Set-up, Confrontation, and Resolution. They also include several twists and turns. *"On a basic level, Act One sets up the world, characters, the character's goal, as well as the conflicts or*

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[3] Glatch, S. (May 12, 2020), The 5 Elements of Dramatic Structure: Understanding Freytag's Pyramid, Writers.com, Retrieved from: https://writers.com/freytags-pyramid#gallery

obstacles that are preventing them from achieving their goal. Act Two raises the stakes for the character to achieve the goal, escalating the conflict. Act Three resolves the story with either an achievement of that goal or a failure.[4]

Modern structures have even more parts, but they are still based on Aristotelian 3-act-structure. The story can have for example following parts: opening, inciting incident, turning point I, pinch I (small turning point), midpoint, honeymoon, pinch II, turning point II, resolution, ending.

3) Non-fictional genres – journalistic

Genre is a formally and content-wise closed text unit, which is defined by three components: style of language, theme, and composition. The basic division of non-fictional journalistic genres is into two groups: informative and opinion-based. However, when exploring the richness of genres it's useful to have more detailed structure at hand. *"Especially considering the assumptions of Lasswell (1987) and Wright (1968), authors of this school, but also assimilating the contributions of Raymond Nixon (1963), we have the following overview of journalistic genres and their respective functions:*

• informative: social surveillance;

• opinionative: ideas forum;

• interpretation: educational role, enlightening;

• diversional: distraction, leisure;

• utilitarian: assistance in everyday's decisions."[5]

The most important informative genre is news, which has been described in the previous part of this course. The other examples are:

Report: it describes and portrays reality on the basis of facts, mostly obtained through direct participation or observation. It's an extension of a news piece and therefore it has the same characteristics. However, some types of report can also include assessment of the event by the reporter and therefore they can be included under opinionative genres as well.

Feature: it is considered a genre or a methodology of creating the so-called less serious news, which means also important topics but described in broader context, including more personal stories and some background information. It's sometimes called a report with background.

Interview: it is both a method of work (asking questions and gaining answers to be further processed) and a genre. The journalists are clearly in the role of the interviewers and initiate the interview, determine topics, questions, areas, etc. During reproduction, they try to capture not only the words of the persons concerned, but also the atmosphere, typical characteristics of the personalities, and the meaning of their answers. At the same time, they do not have to rewrite

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[4] Maio, A. (December 9, 2019), What is The Three Act Structure? No Formulas Necessary, StudioBinder Inc.,
Retrieved from: https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/three-act-structure/

[5] de Melo, J. M., de Assis, F. (January/April 2016), Journalistic genres and formats: a classification model, Intercom –
RBCC, São Paulo, v.39, n.1, p.39-54, Retrieved from:
https://www.scielo.br/pdf/interc/v39n1/en_1809-5844-interc-39-1-0039.pdf

everything that the interviewees say. Authorization of the interview by an interviewee is a good practice.

Typical examples of opinionative genres are:

Article: it contains a clear, factual, logical, and comprehensible expression of a topic or a description of an event. It is the result of the author's subjective approach to the issue, which is also reflected in the language used in the article. It seeks connections, causes, consequences. Article analyses, classifies, and generalises.

There is also an expert article, which aims to present scientific knowledge concisely and comprehensively, taking into account characteristics of an audience.

Comment: it responds to information presented by the news. These are listed in the introduction, followed by contextual information (putting the original news in context with other events or information) and presentation of the author's own opinions. This is followed by a conclusion containing the interpretation and summary of the text. The comment usually expresses either the opinion of the author (commentator) or the given medium.

Column: it is a piece where writers express their opinions in one or a few columns. It generalises a specific topic and is often ironic. It was usually written in italics on the edge of the newspaper in response to a current topic. In some cases it can be based on a funny narration.

4) Non-fictional – documentary

Documentary is a type of film whose main goal is to portray reality as opposed to both feature and animated films. It uses specific shooting techniques – shaky camera, hidden camera, or improvisation – which are sometimes adopted by other film genres (e.g. mockumentary). Documents sometimes become tools of propaganda (for example Leni Riefenstahl in Nazi Germany) or manipulation. Sometimes they are an important testimony, manifesto, or type of investigative work.

Alberto Cavalcanti, Brazilian-born director, producer, screenwriter, and art director of motion pictures in the mid-20th century, gave several recommendations to documentary film-makers. They were summarised by Uruguayan literary critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal:

1. Do not work on generalised topics. You can write an article about the postal service, but you have to make a film about a single letter.
2. Do not deviate from the principle, according to which there are three basic components of a film: social, poetic, and technical.
3. Do not neglect the script or rely on filming coincidence. When you have a script written, your film is completed; when you start shooting, you start again from the beginning.
4. Don't trust the commentary that it will tell your story; this must be done by the pictures and sound. Commentary is distracting - especially the groundless one.
5. Remember that each shot is part of a sequence and each sequence is part of the whole film; if it is not in the right place, even the most beautiful shot becomes worse than an absolutely ordinary shot.

6. Do not invent camera angles unless necessary; autotelic angles are disruptive and destroy emotional perception.

7. Do not misuse fast cut; the accelerated rhythm can be just as monotonous as the most spectacular slow rhythm.

8. Do not overuse music; if you do it, the audience will stop perceiving the music.

9. Excessive use of optical effects or their excessive complexity is not recommended. Use transitions and fade-outs as movie punctuation: these are your commas and dots.

10. Do not film too many detailed shots; keep them for climax. In a well-balanced film, they appear naturally; if there are many of them, they suffocate each other and lose all their meaning.

11. Do not hesitate to portray people and their relationships; human beings can be just as beautiful as other creatures, just as beautiful as machines or landscapes.

12. Do not tell your story indefinitely; the true subject must be told clearly and simply. Clarity and simplicity, however, does not exclude dramatisation in any way.

13. Don't give up the opportunity to experiment; the documentary has gained its prestige thanks to experimentation. Without it, the documentary would lose its value, it would cease to exist.[6]

5) Fictional

Drama

Drama is telling the story through dialogues and monologues. In the past, theatrical stage performances were common, but now they also appear in feature films, radio, television, and in other forms of audiovisual works. The basic theoretical principles of the drama were established by Aristotle in his Poetics, where he described the structure of a tragedy.

A comedy is a literary or dramatic genre that always ends happily. The opposite of comedy is **tragedy**. Comedy is expected to provide a humorous insight into human weaknesses and human inadequacies. Humour along with comics are usually the basic elements of this genre. The hero's problems are finally solved and everything turns out well.

6) Genres in between (cross-genres)

Mockumentary

It is a blend of fact and fiction. *"In the mockumentary film genre, a movie is presented as a documentary even though everything in it is false. Mockumentary filmmakers use parody, satire and often humour to comment on current events and ideas."*[7] The first mockumentary is dated back to 1957 in the US[8].

[6] Rady Alberta Cavalcantiho mladým dokumentaristům (1955), Film a doba 1, 1955, č. 11-12, s. 521, Retrieved from: https://af335867-038c-4e79-acd1-184b4e08a315.filesusr.com/ugd/029791_dcc4074ab0e5468eb810f014eb08fa65.pdf

[7] Napolitano, V. (2020), The Mock Doc Film Series: History of the Mockumentary Film, CUNY Academic Works, Retrieved from: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/3583/

[8] Wikipedia (April 10, 2021), Mockumentary, Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mockumentary

Similar genres are docudrama (fiction that includes documentary elements) and docufiction (documentaries including fictional elements).

Dramedy

It is also called comedy-drama, *"a television program or series using both serious and comic subjects, usually without relying on conventional plots, laugh tracks, etc."*[9] The first dramedy is dated back to 1969 in the US[10].

Satire

Satire (from the Latin *satur* and *lanx satura* – miscellany or medley) stands for a work of art, especially a literary one, using comicism, ridicule, caricature and irony to criticise shortcomings and negative phenomena. Writers and other authors use it to address societal issues. *"Satire can be part of any work of culture, art or entertainment. It is an often-humorous way of poking fun at the powers that be. Sometimes, it is created with the goal to drive social change. Satire has a long history and it is as relevant today as it was in ancient Rome."*[11]

7) Division of films on basis of running time

Feature film (feature length film) is usually between 75 and 210 minutes long.

Featurette is shorter than feature, but longer than short film, usually 24 – 40 minutes long.

Short films are usually shorter than 40 minutes.

[9] dictionary.com (2021), Dramedy, Dictionary.com, LLC, Retrieved from: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/dramedy

[10] Wikipedia (April 25, 2021), Comedy-drama, Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy-drama

[11] MasterClass staff (November 8, 2020), What Is Satire? How to Use Satire in Literature, Pop Culture, and Politics—Plus Tips on Using Satire in Writing, MasterClass, Retrieved from: https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-satire-how-to-use-satire-in-literature-pop-culture-and-politics-plus-tips-on-using-satire-in-writing

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