

Nine-Box Method of Planning a Novel

<p>1. Triggering Event</p> <p>First things first. What happens? Why have you bothered to write a book, and more importantly, why should a reader invest time flipping through its pages? Your triggering event is the answer to these questions, so make it a good one. Also, don't make the reader wait very long for it. First page, first paragraph, first sentence. These are good spots for a triggering event.</p>	<p>2. Characterization</p> <p>Generally, books succeed or fail on the strength of their characters, more so than on the strength of their plots. Box 2 is where you explore what makes your protagonist tick. No, this isn't an excuse for drawn out exposition, history, or back story. If your triggering event is captivating, the reader will discover enough about the protagonist in Box 2 simply by reading how he or she reacts to the event.</p>	<p>3. First Major Turning Point</p> <p>By now, your plot is picking up steam, and because of Box 2, the reader is invested in the ride. Time to throw a curve ball. This turning point can be either a positive event for your protagonist, or a negative one, but it should lay the groundwork for the negative turning point in Box 6. There is a reason these boxes are touching one another; they interrelate. For example, Box 3 may introduce the motivation of the antagonist, which then justifies the events in Box 6.</p>
<p>4. Exposition</p> <p>You've earned some time to fill the reader in on important data. Since this box touches Box 1, here's where you shed some light on that triggering event. Since it also touches Box 7, you get to foreshadow your protagonist's darkest hour. Box 4 often reveals a relationship, character flaw, or personal history that contributes to the dark times ahead.</p>	<p>5. Connect the Dots</p> <p>Here is where many plots fall apart. Box 5 represents the trickiest part of fiction, and since it is the center of the diagram (and book) it must connect to all the boxes around it. (2, 4, 6, & 8.) Kind of like the nucleus at the center of a bomb, Box 5 should tick systematically upon elements introduced in Boxes 2 and 4. And like the calm before the storm, Box 5 should give the false impression of resolution before heading like a freight train to Box 6. Most importantly, it needs to provide foreshadowing for the protagonist's revelation in Box 8. That's a lot for a little box to do, but focus on efficient prose to get it right. Your plot depends upon it.</p>	<p>6. Negative Turning Point</p> <p>Here's where that bomb explodes and all (word censored) breaks loose. Good thing you laid the groundwork in Box 3. Good thing, too, that Box 9 will deliver some just desserts.</p>
<p>7. Antagonist Wins</p> <p>The protagonist is defeated here, and the antagonist apparently wins. How the protagonist deals with the darkest hour of defeat depends upon the traits and/or story developed in Box 4, which leads to his or her revelation in the next square.</p>	<p>8. Revelation</p> <p>Of course! The protagonist's revelation turns the tide. Here is where the protagonist connects the dots and overcomes the obstacles of Boxes 6 and 7 via the device introduced in Box 5.</p>	<p>9. Protagonist Wins</p> <p>The negative turning point in Box 6 is rectified while the character's resolve from Box 8 is brought into full bloom. Congratulations! Another great tale told greatly.</p>

Source of the nine-box is unknown. First mentioned at www.verlakay.com/boards. Grid from www.deannaroy.com