



Nine Blocks, 27 Chapters.

*three acts,
counted out.*

A complete working guide to the three-act, nine-block, twenty-seven-chapter method: three acts split into nine blocks of three chapters, a turn at the end of every block, a worked novel carried block by block from hook to resolution, the mistakes that let the grid go flat, and a printable chapter grid to plan your own.

How to use this guide.

read it once for the shape, then keep it open while you outline.

The three-act, nine-block, twenty-seven-chapter method was popularized by the writer and video essayist known as **Katytastic**, who laid a familiar three-act spine over a grid of twenty-seven chapters, grouped into nine blocks of three. Its promise is simple and demanding: give every chapter a job, and put a turn at the end of every block, so a novel never coasts. This guide is One More Draft's independent walkthrough of the method as it appears in our planner, and it is not affiliated with or endorsed by its popularizers.

What follows is a plain tour of the grid: what each block is for, how its three chapters move, where drafts sag, and a running novel carried block by block so you can watch the shape work. Two orientation notes. The percentages are **targets, not laws**; they exist so you can see the shape at a glance. And the real unit is the block, not the number twenty-seven; scale the chapters to your book and keep the nine turns.

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Threes all the way down.

twenty-seven chapters, nine blocks, three acts, one rhythm.

The method is built entirely out of threes. Three chapters make a **block**. Nine blocks make the novel. Three acts hold the blocks. And inside most blocks, the three chapters run a single rhythm: a **reaction**, an **action**, and a **consequence**, the smallest complete unit of story. Learn that one pulse and you have most of the grid, because the book is that pulse repeated across nine blocks, escalating as it goes and turning hard at every block's end.

The point of counting is not tidiness. It is that every chapter is assigned a job before you draft, so no chapter is filler and none is load-bearing by accident. A chapter that does not react, act, turn, or pay off a consequence has no slot in the grid, which is the method's quiet way of telling you it may not belong in the book. The count is a conscience, not a cage.

The blocks are not divided evenly among the acts, and that is deliberate. Act One takes three blocks, Act Two takes four, and Act Three takes two, the familiar proportions of the three-act shape. The symmetry lives one level down, in the block: three chapters, every time. Each act simply holds as many blocks as its share of the story needs.

THE ONE-SENTENCE VERSION

An ordinary world is disrupted, and across nine three-chapter blocks the protagonist reacts, acts, and pays, turning at the end of each block, until a midpoint flips them from reactive to proactive and a final block settles the conflict in a changed world.

A turn in every chapter.

the rule that keeps the long middle from going flat.

The single idea that makes this grid worth the counting is the **turn**. At the small scale, every chapter should end somewhere other than where it began: a new fact, a decision, a reversal, a door opened or shut. At the large scale, every block ends on a hard turn, the pinches and plot points that swing the story onto a new heading. Nothing coasts, because the grid never lets three chapters pass without a change the reader can feel.

This is the method's answer to the **saggy middle**, the long flat stretch where so many drafts die. In a loose outline, Act Two is one vast space with a beginning, an end, and fog between. Here it is four blocks, each a pulse of reaction, action, consequence, and turn. The protagonist cannot wander, because every third chapter the ground moves.

Laid over the classic three acts, the grid falls into place. Act One is blocks one through three, ending on Plot Turn 1 at chapter nine. Act Two is blocks four through seven, with the midpoint at chapter fifteen and Plot Turn 2 closing it at chapter twenty-one. Act Three is blocks eight and nine, carrying the protagonist through the climax to the resolution. If you know the three-act shape, you already know where the load sits; the grid just tells you what each chapter does to get there.

BUILD THE GRID IN FOUR LINES

- **Premise:** hero, situation, and the central conflict, in one sentence you could say to a stranger.
- **Protagonist:** the flaw and the want, drawn so the flaw is the thing the ending will have to cure.
- **The antagonistic force:** who or what pushes back, with a reason of its own, strong enough to last twenty-seven chapters.
- **The turns:** name Plot Turn 1, the midpoint, Plot Turn 2, and the climax before you outline; the blocks fill in around them.

THE RUNNING EXAMPLE • MEET NORA

*Throughout this guide we follow one invented novel, working title **The Last Edition**. Nora Kelleher, thirty-four, edits and reports the entire Ferris County Courier, the last weekly paper in a dying Maine mill town. Her flaw: she hides inside the work, using people as sources and calling the distance objectivity. Her want: one last front page that matters, and with it, to keep the paper alive. The antagonistic force: Halcyon, a company promising four hundred jobs on a land deal built on a forged water permit, and its liaison, Vance Ordell, who believes the town's survival is worth one buried truth.*

Three acts, nine blocks.

three blocks up, four across the middle, two down.

The grid divides into three acts of unequal size and nine blocks of equal shape. Act One takes three blocks to set the world and turn it. Act Two takes four, the long confrontation, hinged on the midpoint. Act Three takes two, the climb to the climax and the settling after. Percentages are targets; what matters is that a turn closes every block, and the midpoint sits near the center.

ACT ONE • SETUP

1	The Hook • Ch 1-3	~4-11%
2	The First Response • Ch 4-6	~15-22%
3	The First Turn • Ch 7-9	~26-33%

ACT TWO • CONFRONTATION

4	The New World • Ch 10-12	~37-44%
5	The Midpoint • Ch 13-15	~48-56%
6	The Counterpush • Ch 16-18	~59-67%
7	The Second Turn • Ch 19-21	~70-78%

ACT THREE • RESOLUTION

8	The Last Plan • Ch 22-24	~81-89%
9	The Climax • Ch 25-27	~93-100%

Notice the weight. Four of the nine blocks fall in Act Two, which is why the middle is where books sag and where this method spends most of its discipline. Each of those four blocks carries its own turn, so the long confrontation reads as four escalating pulses rather than one held note.

BLOCK 1 • THE HOOK

CH 1-3 • ~4-11%

The Hook.

the ordinary world, the match, and the first flinch.

The first block does three jobs in three chapters. It shows the protagonist in their ordinary world and plants the flaw. It drops the inciting incident that disrupts that world. And it catches the protagonist's first instinctive reaction, before thought or plan. By the end of chapter three the reader knows who this is, what is missing in them, and that the ground has shifted. The block turns from here is a life to here is a life interrupted.

THE THREE CHAPTERS

- **Ch 1 • Introduction.** Establish the protagonist, the voice, and the ordinary world; plant the flaw and what is missing.
- **Ch 2 • Inciting Incident.** The event that disrupts the ordinary world and sets the story in motion.
- **Ch 3 • Immediate Reaction.** The first, instinctive response, before a considered plan can form.

Resist the urge to open on the incident itself. Chapter one buys the disruption its weight; without a settled world to break, chapter two has nothing to disturb. Keep the immediate reaction instinctive, not strategic. The considered response belongs to the next block; here the protagonist only flinches, in a way that shows the flaw at work.

WATCH OUT

The cold open with no floor. If you skip the ordinary world and start at the inciting incident, the reader has no baseline to measure the change against, and the hook lands on nothing. Give us one chapter of the life before you break it.

THE LAST EDITION • NORA

Chapter one: Nora puts the Courier to bed alone at midnight, killing a wedding notice to make room for a zoning story no one asked for. The flaw shows at once. Chapter two: Emmett Poe, the mill's retired hydrologist, dying, hands her a folder proving Halcyon's water permit is forged. Chapter three: she skips her sister's rehearsal dinner and pulls the public filings that night. She is already in.

BLOCK 2 • THE FIRST RESPONSE

CH 4-6 • ~15-22%

The First Response.

react, act, and pay for it. the block's first full breath.

This block is the method's signature rhythm at full size: reaction, action, consequence. The protagonist processes the disruption and weighs options, makes a deliberate move, and lives with a result that is rarely clean. It is the first complete mini-arc, and it teaches the reader how the whole book will move, not in one long slope but in these three-beat pulses, each one ending somewhere new.

THE THREE CHAPTERS

- **Ch 4 • Reaction.** The protagonist processes the new situation and considers options.
- **Ch 5 • Action.** A deliberate move to deal with the problem.
- **Ch 6 • Consequence.** The result reshapes the situation, and rarely goes to plan.

Let the action arise from the flaw, not from competence alone. A protagonist who solves the problem cleanly ends the story early; one whose characteristic move creates a fresh complication keeps it alive. Aim the consequence so it closes this block and opens the next, giving the pressure somewhere to go.

WATCH OUT

The clean win. If the first action simply works, the engine stalls. Make the consequence a complication, an escalation, or a cost, something that leaves the protagonist better informed and worse off.

THE LAST EDITION • NORA

Chapter four: Nora weighs it. The Courier is three weeks from folding, Halcyon is the town's promised savior, and running this could bury both. Chapter five: she files a formal records request for the permit. Chapter six: the county clerk, an old friend, warns her off. The file is under a hold, and now someone knows she is looking. The story has teeth, and they turn on her.

BLOCK 3 • THE FIRST TURN

CH 7-9 • ~26-33%

The First Turn.

pressure, a hard jolt, and the door out of act one.

The third block drives the first act to its hinge. Pressure squeezes the protagonist toward a decision they have been avoiding. A pinch, a jolt of antagonistic force, forces commitment. And Plot Turn 1 changes everything, launching the protagonist out of the ordinary world and into the central conflict. This is the end of Act One, and the turn should feel like a point of no return.

THE THREE CHAPTERS

- **Ch 7 • Pressure.** Stakes mount; the protagonist is squeezed toward a decision.
- **Ch 8 • Pinch.** A jolt of antagonistic force; a setback that forces commitment.
- **Ch 9 • Plot Turn 1.** A turn that changes everything and launches the central conflict. End of Act One.

Build the pinch and the turn from the same pressure, so the reader feels cause rather than coincidence. Plot Turn 1 works best when the protagonist chooses it; a turn that merely happens to them starts Act Two on the back foot. Whatever they commit to here is the promise the rest of the novel keeps.

WATCH OUT

The turn that changes nothing. If the protagonist could still walk away after chapter nine, it was a pinch, not a turn. Close the door behind them: burn the boat, sign the contract, publish the piece.

THE LAST EDITION • NORA

Chapter seven: Halcyon offers to buy a year of ads that would save the paper, a bribe dressed as a rescue. Chapter eight: her father, Wendell, a town selectman, asks her to let it go for Ferris, and lets slip that he is tied to the deal. Chapter nine: Nora runs a short item, questions remain about Halcyon's water permits. It detonates. The advertisers she needs are gone by morning, and she is committed. End of Act One.

BLOCK 4 • THE NEW WORLD

CH 10-12 • ~37-44%

The New World.

the same rhythm, now in deeper water.

Act Two opens with the same three-beat pulse, now inside the changed world the first turn created. The protagonist reacts to the new stakes, acts against the central conflict, and absorbs a consequence that reshapes the plan. This is where the method earns its keep. The long middle is not one undifferentiated stretch but a chain of these blocks, each turning, so the second act never becomes the flat plain where drafts go to die.

THE THREE CHAPTERS

- **Ch 10 • Reaction.** The protagonist absorbs the Act One turn and adapts to the new world.
- **Ch 11 • Action.** A proactive move against the central conflict.
- **Ch 12 • Consequence.** The fallout reshapes the protagonist's plan.

Vary the arena from the last block so the rhythm does not feel mechanical. If the first response was public, make this one private; if it was practical, make it personal. The reader should register the pattern of reaction, action, consequence as momentum, never as repetition.

WATCH OUT

The treadmill middle. Three blocks of identical moves read as one move typed three times. Each consequence must change the board, so the next action cannot be the same action in new clothes.

THE LAST EDITION • NORA

Chapter ten: the fallout lands. Advertisers flee, the town turns on Nora, a source stops returning calls. Chapter eleven: she goes around the wall, tracing Emmett's data to a state database. Chapter twelve: the state records have been altered too. The rot runs higher than Halcyon, and her small-town story has become something she is no longer sure she can survive.

BLOCK 5 • THE MIDPOINT

CH 13-15 • ~48-56%

The Midpoint.

pressure, a pinch, and the book's center of gravity.

The fifth block runs to the midpoint, the pivot of the whole novel. Pressure and a second pinch tighten the screws, and then the midpoint delivers a revelation or reversal that changes the protagonist's relationship to the story. Before it they are mostly reacting; after it they go on offense. A strong midpoint reframes what the book is really about.

THE THREE CHAPTERS

- **Ch 13 • Pressure.** The screws tighten as the midpoint approaches.
- **Ch 14 • Pinch.** Another forceful blow from the opposition.
- **Ch 15 • Midpoint.** A revelation or reversal that shifts the protagonist from reactive to proactive.

Make the midpoint a turn of understanding, not just of plot. The most durable ones hand the protagonist a truth that raises the personal stakes, so the second half is driven by choice rather than by circumstance. If chapter fifteen only makes things bigger, push it until it makes things different.

WATCH OUT

The false midpoint. A shock that changes events but not the protagonist leaves the back half reactive. The midpoint should flip the polarity of the story, turning the hunted into the hunter, or the hunter into the hunted.

THE LAST EDITION • NORA

Chapter thirteen: the paper's landlord, quietly pressured, gives Nora notice on the office. Chapter fourteen: Halcyon's liaison, Vance Ordell, offers her a national platform to make her go away, and it is genuinely tempting. Chapter fifteen: she finds the forged signature is her father's. The story is now about her own family, and she stops defending and starts building a case.

BLOCK 6 • THE COUNTERPUSH

CH 16-18 • ~59-67%

The Counterpush.

proactive at last, and the cost of it.

With the midpoint behind them, the protagonist takes the fight to the conflict. The block runs its reaction, action, consequence rhythm again, but the action here is bolder and more committed than anything in the first half, and the consequence is correspondingly heavier. The back half of Act Two is about escalation: the protagonist wants the goal more, and it costs more.

THE THREE CHAPTERS

- **Ch 16 • Reaction.** The protagonist regroups around the midpoint's new context.
- **Ch 17 • Action.** A bolder, more committed move toward the goal.
- **Ch 18 • Consequence.** Consequences escalate; the cost of the goal rises.

Let the protagonist win something real here, then pay for it. A back-half block that only piles on defeats grows monotonous; a hard-won gain that carries a hidden price keeps hope and dread in the same scene. Aim the consequence to set up the descent of the next block.

WATCH OUT

The consequence-free victory. If the bolder move succeeds without cost, the climb goes slack right before its hardest stretch. Attach the price to a person the reader has come to care about.

THE LAST EDITION • NORA

Chapter sixteen: Nora regroups and decides to build an airtight case, not just another item. Chapter seventeen: she interviews the dying Emmett on the record, on tape, the best gift he has left to give. Chapter eighteen: he dies two days later, and his pressured family disavows the recording. Her strongest evidence is now contested, and the one man who could defend it is gone.

BLOCK 7 • THE SECOND TURN

CH 19-21 • ~70-78%

The Second Turn.

maximum pressure, the hardest blow, and the low point.

The seventh block closes Act Two the way the third closed Act One, but harder. Pressure reaches its maximum, the opposition lands its strongest blow, and Plot Turn 2 arrives, often as the protagonist's lowest point, the moment that also hands them the last piece they need. This is the end of Act Two, and it should look, briefly, like the goal is lost for good.

THE THREE CHAPTERS

- **Ch 19 • Pressure.** Maximum pressure as Act Two nears its end.
- **Ch 20 • Pinch.** The hardest blow yet; the opposition at full strength.
- **Ch 21 • Plot Turn 2.** The final turn, often the lowest point, that hands over the last piece. End of Act Two.

The low point and the last piece should be the same event, so despair and the means of victory arrive together. Trace the collapse to the protagonist's flaw, not to bad luck; a defeat they authored becomes the ground the third act climbs from. Strip them of their assets honestly here.

WATCH OUT

The cushioned low. If the reader can see a reserve the protagonist still holds, the bottom is a ledge, and the climb loses its stakes. Take the ally, the evidence, and the illusion in the same stretch.

THE LAST EDITION • NORA

Chapter nineteen: the board sets a Friday hearing to approve the deal, and everything converges on it.

Chapter twenty: Vance leaks Nora's own buried secret, that she once killed a story to protect a friend, and her credibility collapses. Chapter twenty-one: cornered, Wendell offers to confess privately if she drops it, or she can run it and destroy her father in public. She has the last piece. Using it means burning him. End of Act Two.

BLOCK 8 • THE LAST PLAN

CH 22-24 • ~81-89%

The Last Plan.

reckon, commit, and set the board for the end.

Act Three opens with one more reaction, action, consequence pulse, aimed now at the climax. The protagonist reckons with the second turn and resolves to finish it, commits to a final plan and moves, and watches that plan meet reality, setting the board for the confrontation. This block is the deep breath before the climax, and it is where the protagonist's inner change becomes a choice.

THE THREE CHAPTERS

- **Ch 22 • Reaction.** The protagonist reckons with the Act Two turn and resolves to finish it.
- **Ch 23 • Action.** The protagonist commits to the final plan and moves.
- **Ch 24 • Consequence.** The plan meets reality; the board is set for the climax.

Let the final plan express the lesson of the arc, not just the logic of the plot. The most satisfying third acts have the protagonist do the very thing their flaw forbade in chapter one. Aim the consequence of this block to remove every option but the confrontation.

WATCH OUT

The passive run-up. If the protagonist drifts toward the climax rather than choosing it, the ending feels handed to them. Chapter twenty-three is where they decide, out loud, what they are willing to lose.

THE LAST EDITION • NORA

Chapter twenty-two: Nora reckons, and sees that the thing she has dodged her whole life is exactly this, standing behind the truth with her own name on it, cost and all. Chapter twenty-three: she commits. She will run the full story and put her own killed-story confession inside it, owning the flaw. Chapter twenty-four: seeing her name in public, Wendell decides on his own to testify. The board is set.

BLOCK 9 • THE CLIMAX

CH 25-27 • ~93-100%

The Climax.

final pressure, the decisive choice, and the new normal.

The last block delivers the promise of the premise. Final pressure converges everything on the confrontation; the climax settles the central conflict through the protagonist's own choice and action; and the resolution shows the new equilibrium, answering the thematic question the first chapter asked. Twenty-six chapters of turns have earned this one, and it should feel inevitable and surprising at once.

THE THREE CHAPTERS

- **Ch 25 • Pressure.** Final pressure; everything converges on the confrontation.
- **Ch 26 • Climax.** The decisive confrontation, settled by the protagonist's choice and action.
- **Ch 27 • Resolution.** The new equilibrium; the arc completes and the theme is answered.

The climax must be won by the protagonist, using what the whole book taught them, or the arc does not close. Keep the resolution short and concrete, and let it cost something; an ending that quietly refunds the price cheapens every turn that led here. Mirror the opening with one thing changed.

WATCH OUT

The tidy refund. A resolution that heals every wound and restores chapter one erases the arc. Let the new equilibrium be genuinely new, and leave the scar that proves the change was real.

THE LAST EDITION • NORA

Chapter twenty-five: the hearing room is packed, Halcyon's lawyers ready to discredit her. Chapter twenty-six: Nora runs the full edition that morning and stands as her father testifies; the permit is pulled, the data center dies, and so, perhaps, does the town's easy salvation. She got the truth and paid for it. Chapter twenty-seven: the Courier folds, but Nora starts something smaller and truer, and speaks to her sister again. She has learned to be a person, not just a byline.

Adapting the grid.

scaling the count, sequences instead of chapters, and diagnosing a stall.

SCALING TO YOUR LENGTH

The grid assumes twenty-seven chapters, but the unit that matters is the block, not the chapter number. A short novel might give each block a single long chapter, so the nine blocks become nine chapters. An epic might spend three or four chapters on a block and run to forty or fifty. Keep the nine blocks and their turns fixed, and let the chapter count breathe. What you are protecting is the rhythm, reaction, action, consequence, turn, not the number twenty-seven.

WHEN A CHAPTER IS A SEQUENCE

In some genres a chapter is really a scene sequence. A thriller may deliver the immediate reaction across three fast scenes rather than one chapter; a multi-viewpoint novel may split a single block's beats among several narrators. Read the twenty-seven slots as story functions, not as literal chapter breaks. If the function fires, in one scene or in five, the block is doing its job and the grid still holds.

DIAGNOSING A STALLED DRAFT

The grid is as useful for repair as for planning. Lay a finished draft against the twenty-seven functions and find the empty slots. A saggy middle almost always shows up as blocks four through seven missing their turns, where reaction, action, and consequence blur into a single flat stretch with no consequence changing the board. A rushed ending shows up as blocks eight and nine collapsed into one. Name the missing turn, and you have named the fix.

THE POINT OF THE COUNT

You do not have to write in twenty-seven chapters to use the method. You have to make nine things turn. The chapter numbers are scaffolding; the nine block turns are the building.

Seven ways the grid goes wrong.

read this list again at the end of every draft.

- **1. The cold open with no floor.** Starting at the inciting incident with no ordinary world to break. **Fix:** spend chapter one on the settled life and the flaw, so chapter two has something to disrupt.
- **2. The clean win.** A first action that simply works and ends the engine early. **Fix:** make every consequence a complication or a cost, so the next block has fuel.
- **3. The treadmill middle.** Blocks four through seven repeating the same move. **Fix:** change the board with each consequence and vary the arena, so no two actions are alike.
- **4. The false midpoint.** A shock that changes events but not the protagonist. **Fix:** flip the polarity at chapter fifteen, turning reactive into proactive with a truth that raises the stakes.
- **5. The cushioned low.** A Plot Turn 2 the reader can see the protagonist will easily survive. **Fix:** take the asset, the ally, and the illusion together, and trace the fall to the flaw.
- **6. The passive run-up.** A protagonist who drifts into the climax instead of choosing it. **Fix:** make chapter twenty-three a decision said out loud, expressing the lesson of the arc.
- **7. The tidy refund.** A resolution that restores chapter one and heals everything. **Fix:** keep the cost paid and mirror the opening with one thing changed for good.

THE MASTER DIAGNOSTIC

Walk your outline block by block and ask of each one: what turns here? If you cannot name the turn at the end of a block, that block is a flat stretch, however many chapters it holds. Nine turns, one per block, is the whole method. Miss one and the draft sags exactly there.

Your 27-chapter grid.

print this page. one line per block is enough to start.

ONE-LINE PREMISE

BLOCK 4 • NEW WORLD

CH 10-12

PROTAGONIST: FLAW & WANT

BLOCK 5 • MIDPOINT

CH 13-15

THE TURNS (PT1 / MID / PT2 / CLIMAX)

BLOCK 6 • COUNTERPUSH

CH 16-18

BLOCK 1 • THE HOOK

CH 1-3

BLOCK 7 • SECOND TURN

CH 19-21

BLOCK 2 • FIRST RESPONSE

CH 4-6

BLOCK 8 • LAST PLAN

CH 22-24

BLOCK 3 • FIRST TURN

CH 7-9

BLOCK 9 • CLIMAX

CH 25-27

Fill the premise and the four turns first, then draft each block as a single line: what the protagonist reacts to, does, and pays for, and how the block turns at its end. Nine turned lines are a whole novel in outline.

Keep going.

the paper version ends here. the fill-in version doesn't.

This entire grid exists as a **free interactive planner** at One More Draft, with the same nine blocks and a text box under each one that saves as you type. Read the block, draft your story's version of it right on the page, and walk away with a full chapter-by-chapter outline in an afternoon.

onemoredraft.com/guides/27-chapter

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ONE MORE DRAFT

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