



Seven-Point Structure.

*write the ending first.
then invert it.*

A complete working guide to the seven-point story structure popularized by Dan Wells: all seven points, the backward-planning method underneath them, a worked example carried from a hook to its mirror image, the mistakes that flatten genre middles, and a printable spine sheet to plan your own.

How to use this guide.

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

The seven-point structure is the frame most genre novelists learn second and keep longest. It was popularized by novelist **Dan Wells** (the John Cleaver books) in a conference lecture that spread widely online, in which he credited its bones to an old tabletop role-playing guide and showed, with worked examples, how seven fixed points could carry anything from a comedy of manners to a space opera. The structure's appeal is speed. Seven points, one afternoon, and a spine strong enough to draft against.

This guide is One More Draft's independent walkthrough of the seven points: what each is for, how to write it, where drafts go wrong, and a running example so you can watch the machinery move. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by Dan Wells. Two orientation notes. First, the seven points are **a spine, not a chapter list**. Whole sequences of scenes hang between them, and the frame says nothing about those scenes except which direction they must lean. Second, and this is the frame's real signature, you plan it **backward**. Resolution first, then the Hook as its opposite, then the Midpoint, then everything else. Page three explains why.

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Why you design from the ending backward.

know where you are going. then work out how to get there.

Most frameworks walk forward, from opening image to final one, and ask you to discover the ending on the way. The seven-point structure refuses. Its first instruction is to write the **Resolution**, the moment your protagonist wins (or loses) and the exact shape that outcome takes. Only then do you write the Hook, and you write it as the Resolution's photographic negative. Whatever your protagonist has at the end, they lack at the start. Whatever they believe at the end, they believe the opposite on page one. The story is the distance between those two pictures.

This does two things for a working novelist. It guarantees an arc, because a character defined as the inverse of their ending cannot help but change. And it turns the middle from a void into a route. With both endpoints fixed, the Midpoint is simply the halfway house, the place where the protagonist stops being pushed and starts pushing, and the two Plot Turns are the doors into and out of the journey. The Pinches are where the antagonist proves the doors were worth guarding. Nothing has to be invented from nothing.

The price of this clarity is honesty about what you know. If you cannot write your Resolution, the frame will tell you so at once, and it is right. A story whose ending is unknown to its author cannot be planned backward, and probably cannot yet be planned at all. Write the ending first. Even a bad one gives you a Hook to invert, and a bad ending is far easier to fix once its opposite is on the page beside it.

THE ONE-SENTENCE VERSION

A protagonist begins as the mirror image of who they must become; a plot turn pulls them into the conflict, a pinch forces commitment, the midpoint turns them proactive, a second pinch breaks them, a second plot turn hands them the final piece, and the resolution inverts the opening.

The engine: the hook and resolution mirror.

one axis of change, two ends fixed, one turn of direction between.

The seven-point engine is a single relationship. The **Hook** and the **Resolution** are opposites. The lecture's best-known demonstration is a heroine who begins by despising a man and ends by marrying him, but the mirror works on any axis. Powerless to powerful. Alone to accompanied. Loyal to a lie, then loyal to the truth. Choose the axis and you have chosen your theme, because the axis is what the story is *about*. Everything between the two points exists to move the protagonist along it, and every beat can be checked against it.

The second gear is the **Midpoint**, and its rule is directional. Before it, the protagonist is reactive, responding to a conflict they did not choose. After it, they are proactive, pursuing a plan of their own. The two Pinches bracket the Midpoint and supply the pressure that makes the shift necessary and the plan costly. The two Plot Turns bracket the whole middle and supply the story's two great acquisitions: the problem, at Plot Turn 1, and the means to solve it, at Plot Turn 2. Seven points, one axis, one change of direction.

BUILD THE SPINE IN FOUR LINES

- **Resolution:** the final state, concrete enough to picture. What the protagonist has, does, or believes at the end.
- **Hook:** that state inverted. The same axis, the opposite value, drawn inside an ordinary day.
- **Midpoint:** the moment of choosing to fight. What the protagonist decides to do about the problem.
- **The missing piece:** what they must acquire at Plot Turn 2 to win. A tool, a truth, an ally, a resolve.

THE RUNNING EXAMPLE • MEET TAMSIN

*Throughout this guide we follow one invented fantasy novel, working title **The Wrecking Light**. Tamsin Vale, nineteen, has kept the lighthouse on Gannet Rock alone since old Hollis died, obeying the rule carved above the door. The light does not go out. Resolution, written first: Tamsin puts the light out on purpose, with company, to save a ship. Hook, its inverse: Tamsin keeps the light burning alone, certain it is the coast's only mercy. Axis: obedience becoming judgment. Missing piece: the truth about what the light is for.*

Seven points, three movements.

two states, one turn, and four events that move between them.

The seven points below are the whole frame. Three of them (the Hook, the Midpoint, the Resolution) describe states of the protagonist. The other four are events that move them from one state to the next. Percentages are targets, not laws, and this frame is looser about them than most. What matters is the order and the mirror logic. Each point exists because the Resolution demands it.

THE OPENING • THE WORLD BEFORE

01	Hook	~5%
02	Plot Turn 1	~25%

THE MIDDLE • PRESSURE AND THE TURN

03	Pinch 1	~37%
04	Midpoint	~50%
05	Pinch 2	~62%

THE ENDING • THE MIRROR CLOSES

06	Plot Turn 2	~75%
07	Resolution	100%

Notice the symmetry. Pinch 1 and Pinch 2 sit an equal distance either side of the Midpoint, and so do the two Plot Turns. The planning order runs the other way from the reading order: Resolution, Hook, Midpoint, then the Plot Turns, then the Pinches, working from the outside in. The map above is how the reader meets the story. Plan it from the ends toward the center, and the middle will already know where it is going.

BEAT 01

TARGET ~5%

Hook.

the resolution, reversed, drawn inside an ordinary day.

The Hook establishes the protagonist's starting state and the world it belongs to, and the seven-point frame is unusually specific about what that state must be. It is the **inverse of the Resolution**. If you wrote your ending first, as the frame asks, you already know the Hook's content; your only job is to dramatize it in a scene that reads as ordinary life rather than as a setup. The reader should meet a person, a routine, and a conviction, and should have no idea yet that the conviction is the thing the story will overturn.

The most useful Hooks name the axis without announcing it. A single concrete action, taken with confidence, that the ending will take again with the opposite meaning. The Hook also carries the world: the rules of magic, the political weather, the technology, whatever the Resolution will need the reader to understand. Plant the mechanism of the ending here, in passing, as furniture.

ON THE PAGE

- Write the Resolution's key action first, then stage its opposite here in the same setting, so the echo can land later.
- Show the starting conviction as competence, not as a flaw; the reader should half admire it, or the inversion will feel cheap.
- Plant the Resolution's mechanism as an ordinary object or habit; the reader will forget it for exactly as long as you need.

WATCH OUT

The Hook that is only a mood. If the opening establishes tone and setting but no conviction that can be inverted, the ending has nothing to mirror. Ask what page one's protagonist would call unthinkable. That is your Resolution.

THE WRECKING LIGHT • TAMSIN

Gannet Rock, dusk. Tamsin climbs the hundred and twelve steps, trims the wick, logs the wind, and lights the lamp, as Hollis taught her and as she has done every night since he died. Above the door, cut into the stone: the light does not go out. She polishes the storm shutters without ever closing them. Below, the Teeth show white at low water, and she counts every ship that clears them as hers. Alone, obedient, certain the light is mercy.

BEAT 02

TARGET ~25%

Plot Turn 1.

the event that tilts the world and hands over the problem.

Plot Turn 1 is the event that drags the protagonist out of the Hook and onto the path of the main conflict. It introduces the **central problem**, and in the seven-point frame it does something the inciting incident of other structures need not. It points, however faintly, at the Resolution. A good turn changes the world in the direction of the axis. The person, the truth, or the threat that will eventually invert the Hook makes its first appearance here, even if no one on the page recognizes it.

Because the frame lets a quarter of the story elapse before this point, the stretch after the Hook is where you earn it. Use those pages to make the starting conviction load-bearing in the protagonist's life, so that the turn does not merely add a problem but threatens the thing they have built. Then land the turn as a scene, not a rumor. Something arrives, and the world will not be the same afterward.

ON THE PAGE

- Make the turn a concrete arrival: a person, a discovery, a wreck. Abstract dread does not drag anyone anywhere.
- Aim it at the conviction, so the problem is not just dangerous but specifically inconvenient to who the protagonist is.
- Let the reader glimpse the axis's far end here, in the new arrival's beliefs or in the truth it hints at.

WATCH OUT

The turn that could happen to anyone. If Plot Turn 1 would upset any resident of your world equally, it is not aimed. Rebuild it until it lands hardest on this protagonist's particular certainty.

THE WRECKING LIGHT • TAM SIN

A three-master, the Merrow, comes onto the Teeth at midnight with the Gannet light burning bright and true. Tamsin hears the hull go. One survivor washes up at dawn, a navigator named Corin Dray, who swears the chart put the light a mile east of where it stands. That night, from the gallery, Tamsin sees what she has never looked for. A second light, on the Scarrow headland, small and steady. Someone is burning a false light. The coast is not innocent.

BEAT 03

TARGET ~37%

Pinch 1.

pressure applied. the threat, seen clearly, forces a commitment.

A pinch is **pressure**. Something goes wrong, the antagonist or the obstacle shows its strength, and the protagonist loses ground. The name is exact. The story squeezes, and the protagonist is forced out of hesitation and into commitment. Pinch 1 is often where the reader sees the antagonist plainly for the first time; until now the threat has been a wreck, a rumor, a shape. Here it has a face, a reach, and a willingness to use both. The protagonist gets hurt, and the hurt clarifies.

The craft is proportion. Pinch 1 must cost something real, or the commitment it forces looks like whim, but it must leave the protagonist standing, because Pinch 2 needs room to be worse. A good first pinch takes an asset the protagonist assumed was safe: a supply line, an ally's neutrality, a place to retreat to. Reactive is still the mode here. The protagonist does not yet have a plan. They only, now, have a side.

ON THE PAGE

- Give the antagonist a scene in person, with courtesy if possible; a threat that is polite is more frightening than one that shouts.
- Remove one avenue of retreat on the page, so the reader can watch the story narrow.
- End the pinch with a choice the protagonist makes under pressure, not with the pressure alone.

WATCH OUT

The pinch that is just a fight. Action without loss is spectacle. If the protagonist ends Pinch 1 holding everything they started it with, nothing was pinched. Name what was taken.

THE WRECKING LIGHT • TAMSIN

Mabry Cole rows out from Scarrow with two men and a basket of bread. He is the headman, the one who has traded Tamsin oil and flour for years. He admires the lamp, asks after her health, and explains kindly that the survivor is a thief who will go back with them, and that the light will keep burning. When she says no, they take her supply boat and leave the bread. Tamsin hides Corin in the oil store. She has a side now.

BEAT 04

TARGET ~50%

Midpoint.

from reacting to acting. the protagonist takes the story.

The Midpoint is the frame's turn of direction. Until now the protagonist has been reacting to the conflict, absorbing Plot Turn 1 and Pinch 1 as things done to them. Here they **take ownership**. They commit to a plan, gain a key piece of knowledge, or simply decide that this problem is theirs to solve. The shift sits at the exact center because it splits the book into two mirror halves, one of pressure received and one of pressure returned, and because a reader can feel a story that has passed its center without its hero waking up.

The Midpoint does not need to be the loudest scene in the book. It needs to be a decision, and the decision needs to be visible in every scene that follows. The most reliable Midpoints pair a discovery with a resolve. The protagonist learns something that makes the old passivity impossible, and in the same scene chooses what to do about it. Write the plan down on the page. The reader should be able to say what the protagonist intends, and then watch it fail.

ON THE PAGE

- Convert new knowledge into a stated plan on the page; proactive means the next chapter opens with intent.
- Make the plan a good one, worth the reader's hope; Pinch 2 will hurt more if the plan deserved to work.
- Tie the decision to the axis, so the choice to fight is also a first step away from the Hook's conviction.

WATCH OUT

The Midpoint that only reveals. A twist without a decision leaves the protagonist informed and still passive. After the revelation, ask what they now do differently. If the answer is nothing, the middle has not turned.

THE WRECKING LIGHT • TAMSIN

Tamsin breaks the seal on Hollis's private logs. Forty years of wrecks on the Teeth, each recorded in his careful hand with the wind and the tide and no word of alarm. The keepers have always known about the Scarrow light. She stops waiting for rescue. The Admiralty cutter passes on the first of the month, nine days off. She will signal it and put the logs in an officer's hands.

BEAT 05

TARGET ~62%

Pinch 2.

the bigger, worse pinch. the plan fails and the floor gives way.

Pinch 2 is Pinch 1 **squared**. The same kind of pressure, from the same source, applied to a protagonist who now has a plan to lose. This is the frame's low point, the place where the plan built at the Midpoint collapses, an ally is taken or turns, and the situation looks unwinnable. Its purpose is blunt. The reader must believe the protagonist has lost. Without that belief, Plot Turn 2 is a convenience rather than a rescue, and the Resolution is a formality.

The seven-point frame gives Pinch 2 one extra job that other structures' dark nights do not have. It should complete the case against the Hook's conviction. Whatever the protagonist believed on page one should, here, be shown to be not merely wrong but the very thing that put them in the trap. That is what makes the low point structural rather than sad. The old self has been tried in full and found insufficient, and there is no new self yet.

ON THE PAGE

- Escalate on the same axis as Pinch 1: the same antagonist, the same kind of loss, a magnitude larger.
- Take the Midpoint plan apart piece by piece, on the page; let the reader watch the good idea fail.
- Make the loss personal. A hostage, a betrayal, a burned record. Tactical setbacks do not reach the floor.

WATCH OUT

The cushioned pinch. If the protagonist keeps a hidden ally, a reserve, or an untouched retreat, the reader stops fearing. Audit what they still hold at sixty percent and take it. Plot Turn 2 must arrive into emptiness.

THE WRECKING LIGHT • TAMSIN

The cutter is due tonight, and Cole knows. His men come at dusk, burn the logs in the courtyard, and take Corin down to the boats. Cole tells her, almost gently, that Hollis was his father and the rule above the door was his father's rule. Then they lock her in the lamp room with the light. Keep it burning, girl. The cutter will steer by it. Everything she believed was a wreckers' rule, and she is the one holding the match.

BEAT 06

TARGET ~75%

Plot Turn 2.

the last piece arrives. the hook's setup comes home.

Plot Turn 2 is where the protagonist **acquires what they need to win**. A tool, an insight, an ally, a resolve. This is the moment they realize they have had the answer all along, or receive the final piece that makes the Resolution possible. The key word is *setup*. Whatever arrives here must have been planted in the Hook, because a piece the reader has never seen is a rescue, and a piece they saw and forgot is a payoff. The turn is a door out of the middle, the mirror of Plot Turn 1's door in.

This turn does not solve the problem. It makes solving it possible, and it makes it the protagonist's choice. The pages between Plot Turn 2 and the Resolution are the final campaign, and the frame wants them fought with the new piece in hand and the old conviction abandoned. In practice, the strongest second turns are recognitions rather than deliveries. The protagonist looks at something they have owned since page one and sees, for the first time, what it is for.

ON THE PAGE

- Trace the piece back to a Hook plant; if you cannot find one, go back and install it, then revise the Hook.
- Make the acquisition cost the old conviction outright; the protagonist should have to stop believing something to use it.
- Keep it from finishing the job. The piece enables the Resolution; it must not be the Resolution.

WATCH OUT

The gift from nowhere. A stranger with a map, a spell never mentioned, a cavalry over the hill. If the piece did not exist before the seventy-percent mark, it is not a plot turn. It is an apology.

THE WRECKING LIGHT • TAM SIN

Locked in with the lamp, Tamsin cleans the storm shutters out of habit, and for the first time reads the founder's plate inside the housing. Scarrow built this tower, on the wrong rock. The small steady light on the headland is the charted one. Hers is the false light. The shutters she has polished for a year without ever closing are the whole answer. The rule above the door was never a keeper's rule. She can put it out.

BEAT 07

TARGET 100%

Resolution.

the new piece applied. the hook, inverted, on the page.

The Resolution is the climax and the close in one. The protagonist takes the tool, insight, or ally from Plot Turn 2 and applies it against the conflict, and the Hook's premise is **inverted**. Because you wrote this beat first, drafting it is mostly a matter of keeping faith with the plan. Check the mirror. Same axis, opposite value, ideally the same setting and the same action as the Hook with its meaning reversed, so the reader measures the distance travelled in a single recognition.

Two disciplines. The decisive act must be the protagonist's own, performed with the Plot Turn 2 piece and impossible for the Hook's version of them. And the cost must stay paid. The seven-point frame does not budget a separate denouement; whatever aftermath you write lives inside this beat and should be short, concrete, and unwilling to refund the Pinches. End close to the echo. Once the mirror has landed, every further page is spent on the reader's patience.

ON THE PAGE

- Stage the Hook's key action again with the opposite meaning; same place, same gesture, new verdict.
- Put the protagonist's hand on the final act, using the Plot Turn 2 piece; no one else may perform it.
- Show the inverted conviction in behavior, not a speech, and stop within a few pages of the echo.

WATCH OUT

The Resolution that drifts from the plan. Drafting changes stories, and a Resolution written months ago may no longer fit. Do not force it. Rewrite the Resolution, then walk back and re-invert the Hook. The mirror is the frame; keep it true.

THE WRECKING LIGHT • TAM SIN

The cutter's lantern shows at the edge of the fog, steering for the bright light. Tamsin closes the storm shutters, one by one, until Gannet Rock goes dark for the first time in a hundred years. On the headland, the small charted light stands alone, and the cutter comes about toward it. At dawn the crew find Scarrow's boats waiting in the Teeth, and Corin alive among them. Tamsin climbs the hundred and twelve steps with the officer, and leaves the lamp cold.

Adapting the frame.

plan it backward, then fill the gaps with try/fail cycles.

THE BACKWARD WORKSHEET

The planning order is the frame's most practical gift, and it is worth doing on scrap paper before you touch the worksheet at the back. Write the Resolution in one line. Write the Hook as its opposite. Write the Midpoint as the moment of choosing to fight. Then the two Plot Turns, the door in and the door out, and last the two Pinches, sized so the second dwarfs the first. Seven lines, in that order, and you have a spine. If any line refuses to be written, that is the frame diagnosing a hole in your knowledge of the story, and it is telling the truth.

BETWEEN THE POINTS

The seven points are pillars, and the frame says nothing about the spans between them, which is where most of a novel lives. Fill the spans with **try/fail cycles**. The protagonist attempts something, it partly works or fails outright, and the failure creates the next attempt. Between Plot Turn 1 and Pinch 1 the cycles are reactive and small. Between the Midpoint and Pinch 2 they are the plan being executed and eroded. Between Plot Turn 2 and the Resolution they are the final campaign. A useful test: every cycle should end with the situation changed, never merely delayed, and should lean, however slightly, toward the next point.

MEDIA, LENGTHS, AND STACKING

The frame was built for novels and sits most naturally at that length, but it scales without complaint. A short story runs the seven points in seven scenes; a series runs them per book and again across the whole arc. For complex novels, the lecture's own demonstration is to **stack** the structure. Give the main plot its own seven points, then give each major subplot (the romance, the rival, the political thread) seven points of its own, and interleave the lists so that different threads deliver their pinches and turns in different chapters. The result is a middle that never rests, because some thread is always at a hinge.

Seven ways seven-point stories go wrong.

read this list again at the end of every draft.

- **1. The unwritten ending.** Planning forward from a Hook with no Resolution behind it, so the middle wanders. Fix: write the ending first, even a bad one, and invert it into the Hook.
- **2. The un-mirrored Hook.** An opening that establishes mood and setting but no conviction the story can overturn. Fix: name what page one's protagonist would call unthinkable, then make that the Resolution.
- **3. The unaimed turn.** A Plot Turn 1 that would upset anyone in the world equally. Fix: point it at the protagonist's particular certainty so the problem threatens what they have built.
- **4. The pinch without loss.** Action scenes standing in for pressure; nothing is taken. Fix: name the asset removed at each Pinch, and make the second removal dwarf the first.
- **5. The Midpoint that only reveals.** A twist, then more reacting. Fix: pair the discovery with a decision and write the resulting plan on the page.
- **6. The gift from nowhere.** A Plot Turn 2 piece the reader has never seen. Fix: trace it to a Hook plant, or go back and install one, then revise the Hook.
- **7. The refunded Resolution.** An ending that waives the Pinches' prices and drifts from the mirror. Fix: keep the costs paid, restage the Hook's action inverted, and stop near the echo.

THE MASTER DIAGNOSTIC

For any scene that feels dead, ask which of the two pictures it moves the protagonist toward, the Hook or the Resolution. A scene that moves them toward neither, and does not raise the price of the trip, is furniture, whatever else it accomplishes.

Your spine sheet.

print this page. fill it in from the bottom up.

THE AXIS (FROM / TO)

04 MIDPOINT

50%

THE MISSING PIECE

05 PINCH 2

62%

01 HOOK

5%

06 PLOT TURN 2

75%

02 PLOT TURN 1

25%

07 RESOLUTION

100%

03 PINCH 1

37%

Keep going.

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

This entire spine sheet exists as a **free interactive planner** at One More Draft, with the same seven points and a text box under each one that saves as you type. Read the beat, draft your story's version of it right on the page, and walk away with a complete outline in an afternoon.

onemoredraft.com/guides/seven-point

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ONE MORE DRAFT

The seven-point story structure was popularized by novelist Dan Wells in a widely shared writing lecture, in which he credited its origins to a tabletop role-playing guide. This guide is One More Draft's independent commentary and is not affiliated with or endorsed by Dan Wells or any publisher. © 2026 One More Draft. You are welcome to share this PDF in its original, unmodified form.