

The Inside Outline

What Is the Inside Outline?

An Outline

It's a short and flexible outline of the major scenes of a novel.

A Timeline

It's a timeline that captures the chronology of the story.

A Marriage of Plot and Point

It's a way to bring together the two most important parts of the story in one place.

A Container

It's an efficient way to capture and hold the whole story as you write forward, make changes, and revise.

A Cause-and-Effect Trajectory

It's an illustration of the engine that propels a novel from start to finish.

Why Does It Work?

It lets you see the whole. You can stand back and see the sweep of the whole story, which is a critical perspective to success.

It forces you to focus on what is most important. It never lets you forget that every action has to have a point and purpose. You can't write a scene without knowing the point.

It measures narrative drive. It shows you how one scene drives to the next and how one action causes the next, and allows you to measure where your story may have mistakes or holes.

It gives you permission to innovate. You can easily cut, add, or move scenes to see how they work in various locations. There is no risk to innovating on a 3-page document.

It shows others what you are thinking. It's a powerful way to get quick, insightful feedback on your story from critique partners or your book coach.

It gives you an advantage when it's time to summarize. An Inside Outline is an ideal start to a synopsis (needed to pitch to agents) or a book summary (needed to pursue independent publishing).

How It Looks

PLOT — what happens

POINT — why it matters to the protagonist

Because of that...



PLOT — what happens

POINT — why it matters to the protagonist

And so on....

Example

Thanks to KJ Dell'Antonia for sharing her work in progress!

PLOT — Rhett's invited to appear on the *Today* show to offer advice to grads and plans to refuse, but after a tax bill appears informing her she owes \$60k on the farm she hasn't even claimed yet, Jas persuades her that the appearance will sell books.

POINT — Rhett doesn't believe she has anything to offer others. She wrote the book under a pseudonym and doesn't want to be known as the author.

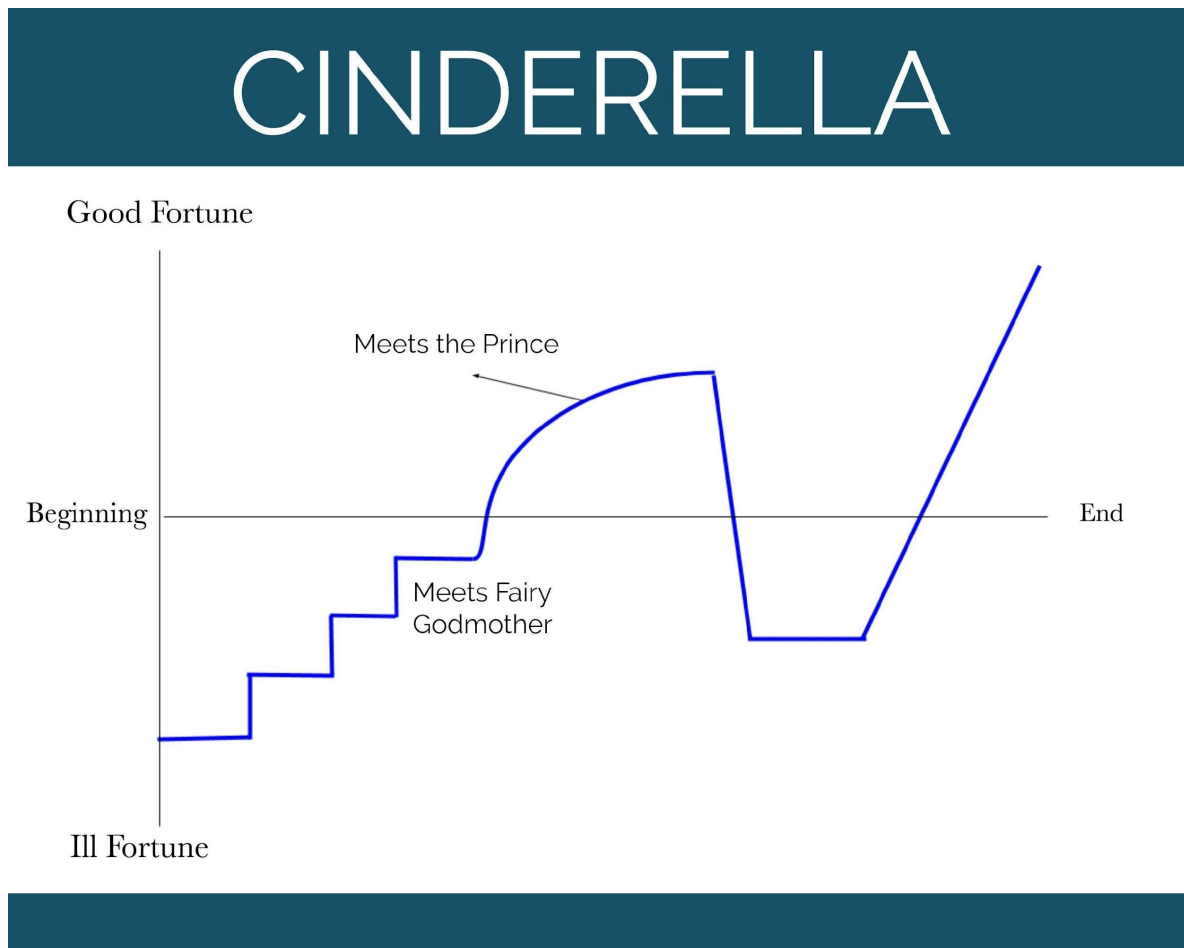
Because of that... Rhett agrees to go on the *Today* show.

PLOT — Rhett's all gussied up and feeling like a fraud. At the studio, Rhett hears her mother's voice and freaks. She cannot do this in front of her mother. She pushes Jas on instead and, when Jas reveals she hasn't read the book, Rhett gives her a quick primer on Maggie.

POINT — Rhett still isn't her own person when she is with others. She is too worried about what they think, especially her mother.

What to Include

Focus on the major events of your novel — the high and low points that define the shape of the story. This graph of Cinderella, from Kurt Vonnegut's [story graphing lecture](#), gives you a sense of what I mean. Plan to include somewhere between 13 to 22 events in total.



For each event you choose to include in your Inside Outline, add the point. Ask yourself:

- What happens in this scene or scenes?
- What does it add to the story?
- Why does this scene have to happen?
- Why does it have to happen now (i.e., why does it have to happen after the last scene and before the next one)?
- What meaning does the protagonist make from this scene? And how does that propel them to take the next action they take?

Follow the Rules

The Inside Outline works best if you follow these rules:

- No more than three pages because the power comes from being CONCISE. Don't cheat by reducing the font or squeezing the line spacing.
- No more than three lines per bullet point.
- Each scene must *cause* the next scene to happen. Think “because of that, the next thing happened” rather than “and then this happened, and then this happened, and then this happened.”

Check Your Work with the 10-Point Inside Outline Checklist

Now stand back and look at the sweep of your story. Use the 10-Point Inside Outline Checklist (see the worksheet in the online course) to check your work.

And then what?

After you develop a 3-page version that is watertight, you can increase the number of events and the number of pages in your Inside Outline. In this way, the Inside Outline can become a living, breathing outline that captures your entire story as you write forward.

Want to know whether you're on the right track with your Blueprint?
Sign up for the Make a Commitment package by Sept. 8!

[SIGN UP NOW](#)