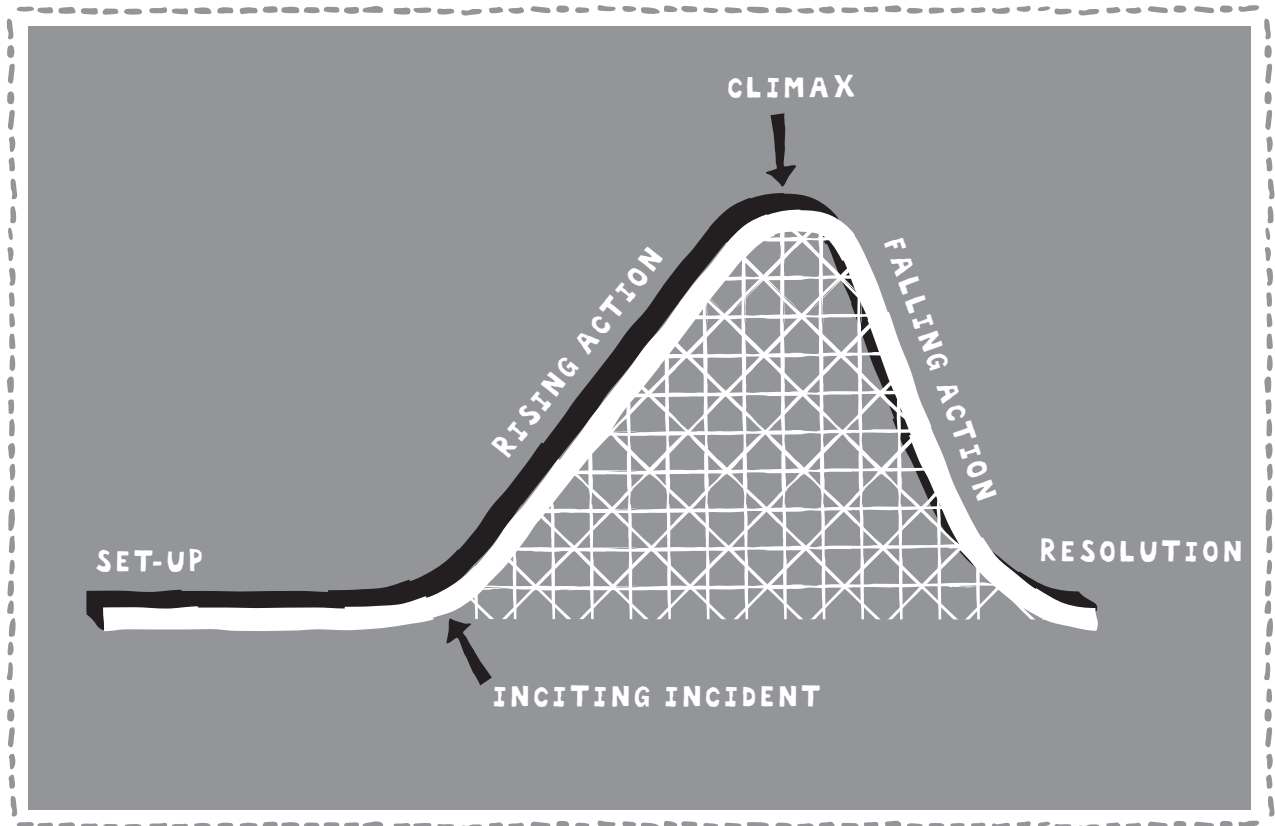


Outlining Your Script

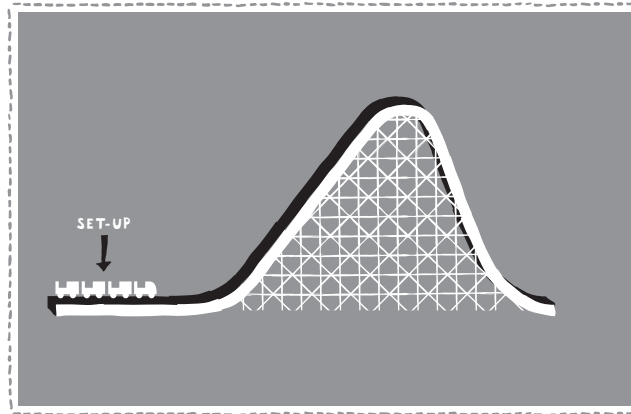
Now that your story has conflict (and maybe even an attention-grabbing logline) you probably have an idea of *what* is going to happen in your script this April. You may know what kind of journey your protagonist will undertake, and what will stand in his or her way. Now it's time to take the next step and map out *how* everything is going to happen.

Writing an entire script from beginning to end may seem pretty daunting, but with a good plan, it won't be as hard as you think. Trust us. Most stories have the same structure, and break down into the same six sections that make up a **plot**. See the diagram below.



Even if this is stuff you already know from English class, read all the sections below carefully before you move on to map out your own plot.

The Set-Up



What kind of rollercoaster are we getting on?

Though some scripts begin with an “inciting incident”—which you will read about in just a second—many of them start by telling the reader a little bit about the characters, the setting, and the conflict before jumping into the action. Just like you'd want to know what kind of rollercoaster you're getting on before waiting in line, a movie executive might want to know what kind of script he or she is about to read before reading the whole thing.

Here is an example of a story's set-up:

INT. BORIS' BEDROOM - DAY

BORIS' mohawk bobs up and down as he plays guitar in his room filled with ROCK BAND POSTERS, GUITAR MAGAZINES, and many different GUITARS, AMPS, and GADGETS. His mom, WILMA, walks into his room with a plate of UNCOOKED POP-TARTS. BORIS swings his GUITAR behind his back.

BORIS

Mom, I'm SO over it!

WILMA

Over what? What does that even mean?

BORIS

Everything. I am bored with everything.

WILMA

I don't understand you at all, little man. You have every guitar and guitar gadget in the world! What else do you need?

BORIS shoves a POP-TART in his mouth.

BORIS

How many times do I have to tell you to stop calling me "little man?" I'm 18! I'm way too old to be sitting in my bedroom like a loser. I want to be in a band. I want to travel the world...

WILMA

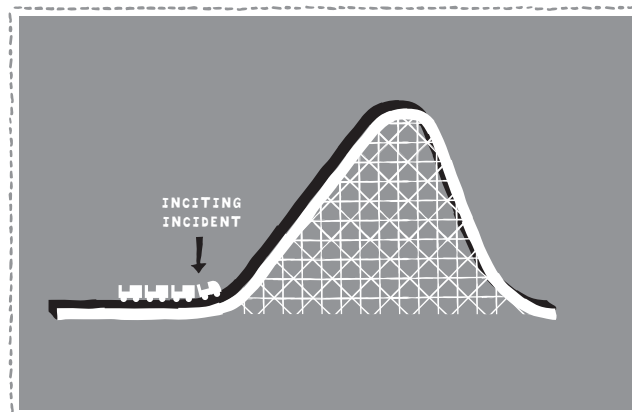
Why don't you try out for that new reality TV show, *So You Think You Can Rock?! I hear auditions are coming to Detroit next weekend, and the grand prize is a two-million dollar contract with Sony Records.*

BORIS

Yeah right! I'd pass out cold in front of an audience that big. And that judge, Billy Van Carnage, is a total jerk. I get nervous just thinking about him.

Okay, that was a good set up. We have been introduced to the protagonist and the story's main conflicts: Boris wants to join a rock band and travel the world, but he has crippling stage fright (**internal conflict**), and it has been hinted that Mr. Van Carnage is also going to pose a problem for Boris (**external conflict**).

The Inciting Incident



Getting on the rollercoaster.

The inciting incident launches your protagonist into the adventure whether he or she is ready or not. It can be a pretty scary moment for your main character. Once it happens, there's no turning back.

Here is the inciting incident that happens in this story:

INT. GUITAR CENTER - NIGHT

BORIS is looking at a STRATOCASTER when he sees ABIGAIL at the counter. BORIS ducks behind a DRUM SET, but it's too late. He's been spotted.

ABIGAIL

That guitar you were looking at is pretty awesome. You should get it. It matches your shirt.

BORIS

(Stammering)

Yeah, totally.

ABIGAIL

So guess what? My band is trying out for *So You Think You Can Rock?! this weekend.*

BORIS

You're so cool. I mean, that's so cool.

ABIGAIL

And I am so glad I ran into you. Our lead guitarist is MIA, and we're totally freaking out. If he doesn't show by this weekend, will you fill in for the tryout?

BORIS

Wow . . .

ABIGAIL

I'll take that as a yes. I'll be at your place at 8 AM sharp Saturday.

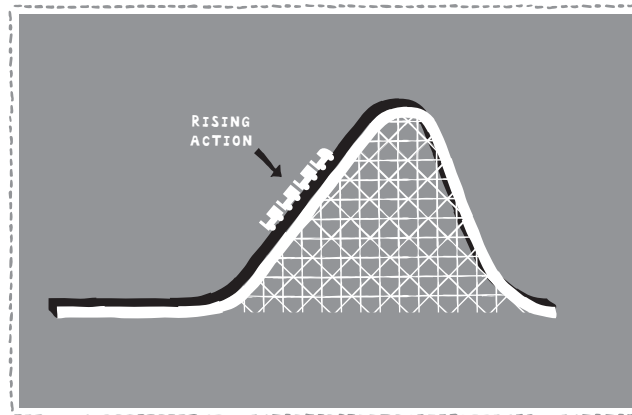
ABIGAIL hands BORIS a CD.

ABIGAIL

Just make sure you know the solo on the first track. See ya Saturday!

If an inciting incident never happened, Boris would more than likely continue to eat breakfast pastries and play guitar alone in his bedroom. This might sound like a pretty fun life to live, but it is not a very fun life to watch.

Rising Action



Climbing the big hill.

This will be the longest section of your script. You will develop your characters, deepen their relationships with one another, and lay out everything that happens to them before the **climax**. Think of the rising action as the biggest hill on the rollercoaster—the higher you go, the more suspenseful it gets. The rising action is made up of many events, each of them building to the most exciting part of your story: the climax.

Here is a summary of some of the rising action in this story:

1. Abigail pulls up outside in her beat-up Volkswagen Jetta and Boris—trying not to look back to his room where his guitars, amps, and pedals are looking sad and deserted—says goodbye to his mom.

Abigail honks until Boris finally hugs his mom, grabs his vintage Fender Jaguar and runs out the door.

2. As soon as they arrive at the auditions, Boris starts to get nervous. He can barely talk to people, but Abigail and the other two band members, Zach (the drummer) and Megan (the bassist), do all the talking. Though Boris is nervous about getting on stage, he finds himself becoming more and more comfortable around Abigail. She is unlike any other girl he has ever met. And she seems to like him.

3. When it's time for Crude Medicine to get up in front of the judges to play, Boris can hardly see straight. Boris knows the song like the back of his hand, so all he has to worry about is not throwing up or passing out.

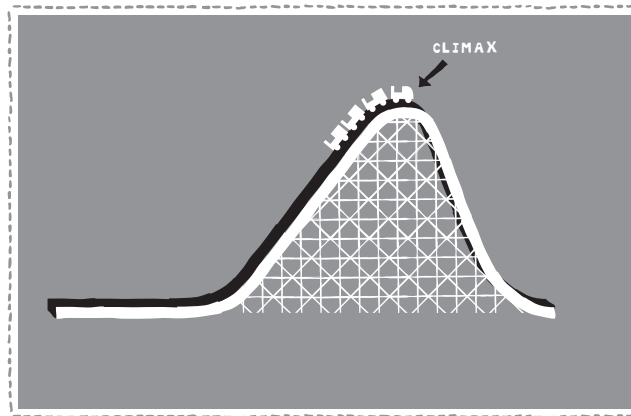
Boris makes it all the way through the song just fine, and Abigail sings lead and nails it. All the judges are blown away, except one.

Billy Van Carnage comments that chick singers are totally "last year" and that the greenish tinge to Boris' skin during their performance was making *him* nervous.

But the rest of the judges outvote him. Crude Medicine is on its way to stardom.

4. Crude Medicine makes it all the way to the final episode and each performance gets easier for Boris. Boris figures they are going to win, and spends less time worrying about impressing the judges and more time daydreaming about all the ways to spend his part of the prize money—a six-month tropical vacation with Abigail, a new house for his mom, or maybe a large donation to a local music school for urban kids. Losing, at this point, is not an option.

The Climax



The top of the rollercoaster.

This is the “gasp” moment at the very top of the rollercoaster, right before your high-speed drop. This moment doesn’t last long, and neither does the climax in your script. It can be as short as one scene—just enough to make an audience hold their breath in suspense and ask, “What’s going to happen next?!”

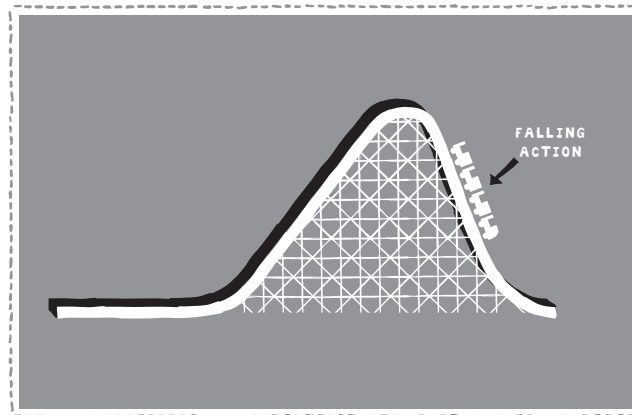
Here is an example of a climax:

INT. SO YOU THINK YOU CAN ROCK!? AMPHITHEATER - NIGHT

The members of Crude Medicine run on stage in their new matching ORANGE JUMPSUITS and WHITE SUNGLASSES. The audience cheers. ZACH counts them in with a few clicks of his DRUMSTICKS.

They begin to play, but all the INSTRUMENTS are out of tune, including the MICROPHONE. Within seconds, they are booted off stage.

The Falling Action



The high-speed drop.

The falling action is what happens next. It is the fast-paced, action-packed part of your script. You're finally speeding down the tracks of the rollercoaster with your hands in the air! Does the antagonist get defeated? Do the protagonist's dreams finally come true? If so, how?

Here is an example of falling action

INT. SO YOU THINK YOU CAN ROCK!? JUDGES TABLE - NIGHT

The Judges sit around a table. BILLY has a huge smile on his face.

GILL

I just don't get it. They were doing so well.

BILLY

I told you that chicks can't rock.

A STAGE HAND runs up to the judges table with a DVD in his hand. Without saying a word, he pops it in the PLAYER. The DVD is of BILLY, messing with the band's equipment before the show.

BILLY

It's not what it looks like . . .

Before BILLY could say another word, two beefy SECURITY GUARDS come in and drag BILLY out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. SO YOU THINK YOU CAN ROCK!? STAGE - NIGHT

CRUDE MEDECINE takes the stage once again. This time they nail the song and the crowd cheers.

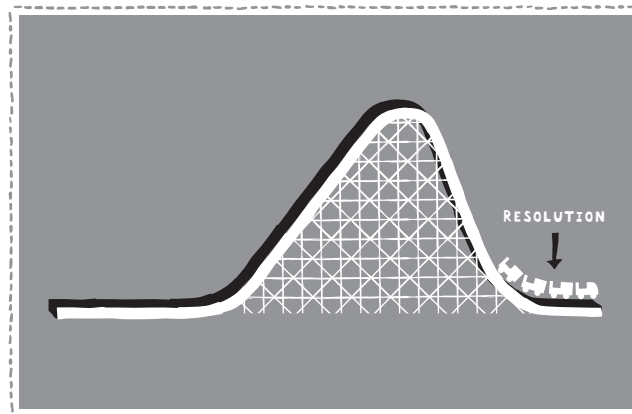
CUT TO:

INT. SO YOU THINK YOU CAN ROCK!? STAGE -MINUTES LATER

GILL

We are proud to announce that the winner of the 2009 season of *So You Think You Can Rock!?* is Crude Medicine!

The Resolution



Getting off the rollercoaster.

This is how things work out in the very end, after your protagonist gets (or doesn't get) what he or she wants. It has been said by creative writing sages that your characters—especially your protagonist—must change over the course of the script. This change happens little by little as your character battles his or her fears, defeats villains, and builds friendships and relationships with a cast of amazing characters. All of these adventures will end up changing the way your main character sees the world and his or her place in it. Try to use the final scenes to highlight those changes.

An example of a resolution:

INT. SPORTS ARENA - NIGHT

Crude Medicine is playing to an arena full of rabid fans.

BORIS
Hello Detroit! It is good to be
home!

ABIGAIL and BORIS kiss and the fans scream.

ABIGAIL
All right, enough of that. Let's
rock!

Now it's your turn to create your plot. Believe us, if you fill out this worksheet, writing your script will be ten times easier in April. You don't have to describe everything that will happen in your script here. This is just to help you get an idea about what'll happen in the beginning, middle, and end.

1. Describe your set-up:

In one to two paragraphs, describe a scene that introduces your characters, your setting, and the main conflicts in your story. You may want to review your conflict worksheet before you do this.

2. Describe your inciting incident:

In one paragraph, describe the event that causes your protagonist to begin his or her adventure.

3. Describe some of your rising action:

Write a list of five events that build up to the climax of your script. Don't forget to include all of your supporting characters and the antagonist.

4. Describe your climax:

In one paragraph, describe what will happen in the climax of your script.

5. Describe your falling action:

In one to two paragraphs, describe what happens after the climax. Does your protagonist get what he or she wants? Does the antagonist get defeated? How?

6. Describe your resolution:

In one to two paragraphs, describe how everything works out in the very end. Is it a happy ending? Sad? Remember to show how your characters changed because of their journey.

Example Plot Rollercoaster

Boris and Abigail leave for tryouts. Boris starts to fall for Abigail. crude Medicine make it onto the show. crude Medicine makes it to the final episode.

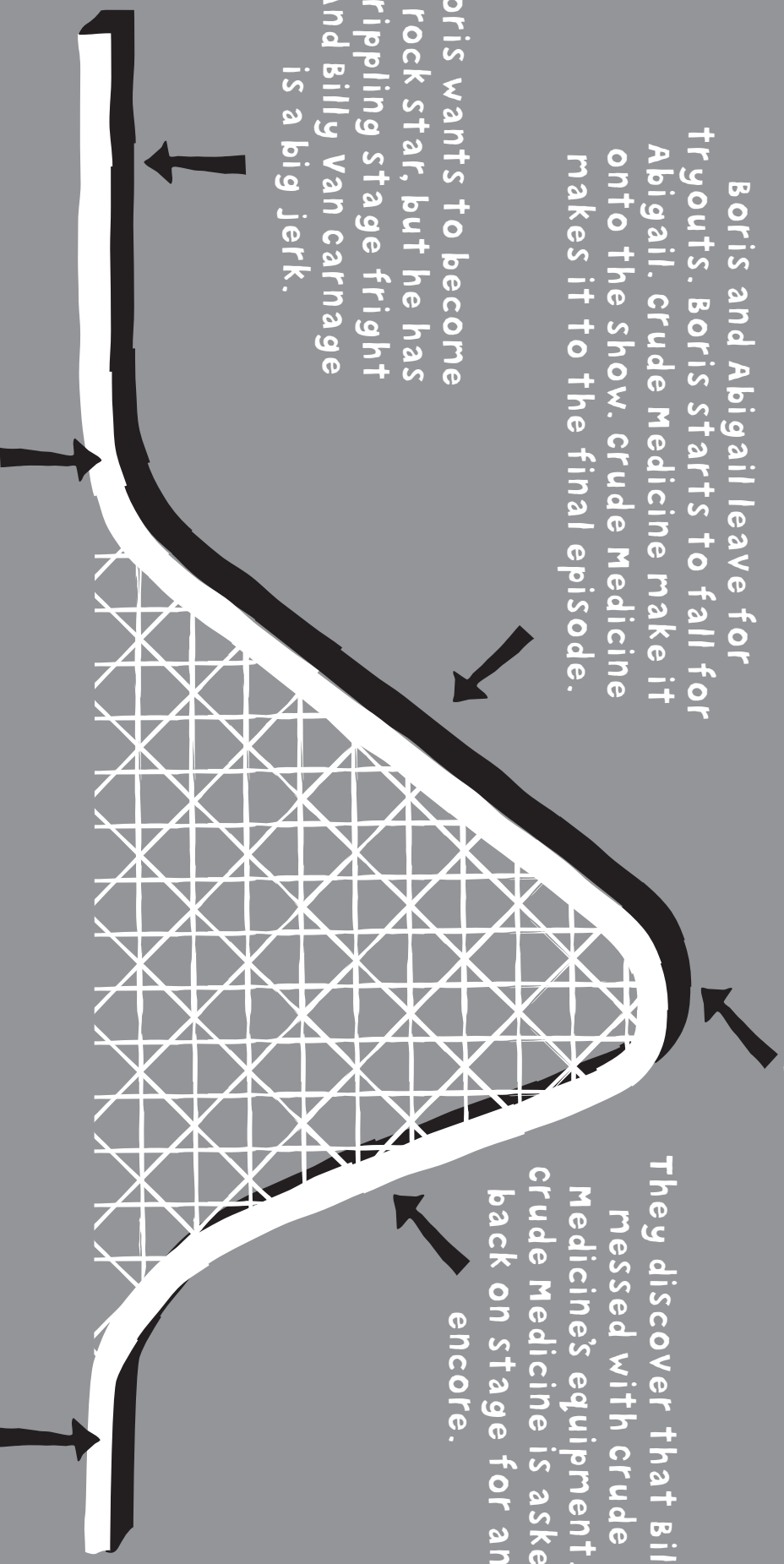
Boris wants to become a rock star, but he has crippling stage fright And Billy Van carnage is a big jerk.

crude Medicine goes on stage for their final performance. Their instruments are out of tune. They get forced off stage.

They discover that Billy messed with crude Medicine's equipment. crude Medicine is asked back on stage for an encore.

Abigail invites Boris to stand in as crude Medicine's guitarist for the *So You Think You can Rock?* tryouts.

crude Medicine becomes a hugely popular rock band. Boris and Abigail get together. Boris has gotten over his stage fright.



Now, fill out your very own plot rollercoaster using the plot outline you just made.

The image shows a plot rollercoaster template on a gray background. A thick black line forms a rollercoaster track that starts at the top left, goes down, then up and right, then down and right, then up and right, and finally down and right. The central part of the track is filled with a white grid pattern. Five white rectangular text boxes with horizontal lines are placed around the track. Arrows point from each text box to a specific point on the track: the top-left box points to the start of the first drop; the top-right box points to the first peak; the middle-right box points to the second peak; the bottom-right box points to the third peak; and the bottom-left box points to the end of the track.

FINAL NOTE ON PLOT!

As you probably know, no two rollercoasters are the same. They all have different hills and drops, different speeds, different twists, turns, loops, and tunnels. The same goes for scripts. That is what makes them different and exciting. Sometimes they begin with the inciting incident or work backwards from the resolution to the beginning. Scripts are filled with flashbacks, flash-forwards, and unexpected plot twists. And scripts don't have to have happy endings either. Just like life, sometimes things don't work out exactly the way you planned them to. During Script Frenzy, experiment with the plot you create by thinking beyond the "typical one-hill rollercoaster" formula. Rearrange events, add some twists, and flip that resolution on its head. You'll be surprised at how much this can energize your story.