

Plot structure generates a larger rhythm to the story. This structure is made up of one or more *incidents*, which are in turn made up of one or more *scenes*. (I use *scene* in roughly the sense it would be used for a play: a setting with distinct time and location.) With these elements too, interest can be created by both variety and repetition.

Different story ideas require different plot structures, but those with appealing rhythms often follow the folktale's "rule of three." For instance, a simple plot might consist of three central incidents—perhaps of parallel construction—framed by an introduction and a conclusion. Sets of three usually work well rhythmically because they satisfy without becoming wearisome.

Another satisfying rhythm is produced by scenes or incidents alternating between opposites—good and evil, wise and stupid, night and day, cause and effect. Of course, these alternations too can be presented in sets of three.

Scenes and incidents convey stronger rhythms when they are clearly demarcated. This is most important for picture book scenes. The first paragraph should set the relative time and location and launch the action. The last paragraph should wind up the action and convey a sense of what has taken place. This paragraph should end with a punch, often in the form of dialog. If picture book scenes are constructed properly, correct placement of page divisions should be obvious without blank lines or other notation in the manuscript.

Typeset in Microsoft Word 2004 on Mac OS X by Aaron Shepard, Jan. 28, 2006. For info and more resources, visit Aaron Shepard's Publishing Page at www.aaronshp.com/publishing.