

A STOP WRITING! FIELD GUIDE

The Plotliner

A seven-sentence story spine you can hear before you write the pages.



Seven notes. Seven sentences. One plot that moves.

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Your story needs a spine.

The Plotliner has two parts. The **throughline** gives your story meaning. The **plotline** gives it a spine.

This field guide stays with the spine.

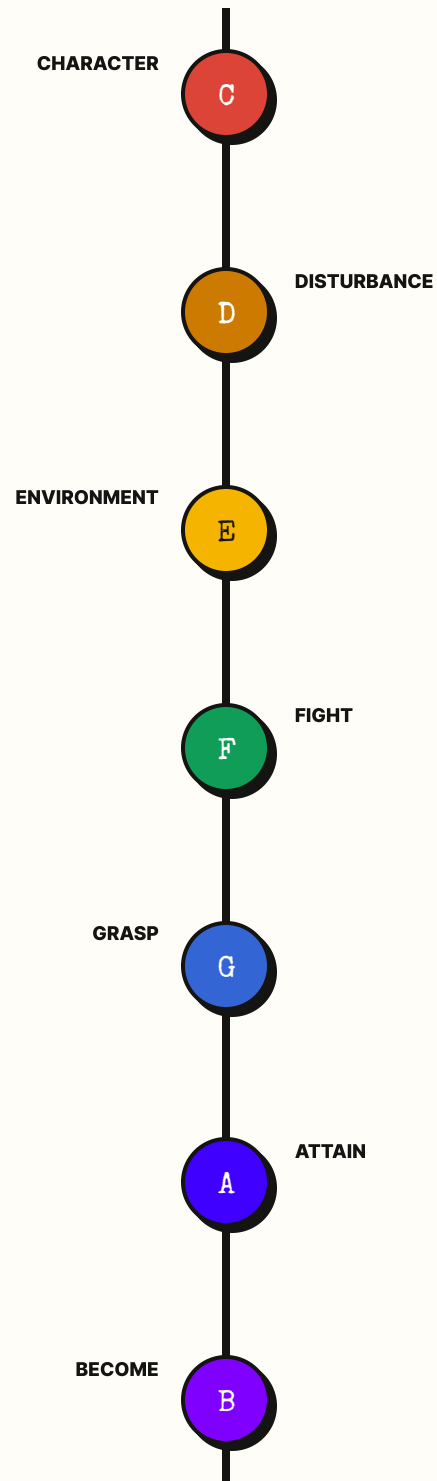
Write the plot in seven sentences, one for each note: C, D, E, F, G, A, B.

You are not outlining every scene. Each sentence marks a turn. Put the seven turns in order and you can hear where the plot moves, where it stalls, and where a piece may be missing.

Why seven notes?

C-D-E-F-G-A-B is inspired by the C major scale. It comes from the Story Scale, an underlying method I use across several tools in the book, including the Plotliner. Here, we use those seven notes to form the story's spine.

What stays in the book: the full throughline, the deeper structure behind each note, complete examples, and the rest of the method.



Play C, D, E, F, G, A, B.

Use each note to write one sentence. These are prompts, not a scene list.



CHARACTER

Who is at the center, and what do they want before trouble arrives?



DISTURBANCE

What breaks the old life and creates a before and after?



ENVIRONMENT

What new world must they enter because of that break?



FIGHT

At the midpoint, how do they meet the force against them?



GRASP

What do they gain, learn, or choose that changes the contest?



ATTAIN

How do they attain the goal through a surprising turn?



BECOME

Who are they after the pursuit has changed them?

Write your seven sentences.

Start with the note you can see. Leave a blank when you need to. Read the finished spine from C through B.

C**CHARACTER**

the protagonist

D**DISTURBANCE**the inciting
incident**E****ENVIRONMENT**

the new world

F**FIGHT**

the challenge

G**GRASP**

the learned lesson

A**ATTAIN**

the achievement

B**BECOME**

the transformation

No scenes. No polish. One sentence per note.

THEREFORE

Read the seven sentences aloud. Put this word between each one.

C	THEREFORE	D	THEREFORE	E	THEREFORE	F	THEREFORE	G	THEREFORE	A	THEREFORE	B
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The read-aloud test

1 Read sentence C.

2 Say **THEREFORE**.

3 Read sentence D.

4 Keep going through B.

*If THEREFORE sounds false, the handoff is loose.
That is the place to work.*

Find one loose handoff.

THE WEAK CONNECTION IS

WHAT CAUSE IS MISSING?

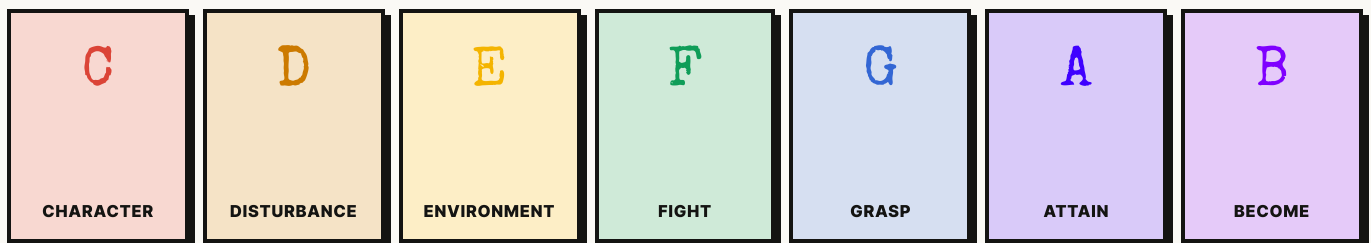
REWRITE THE TWO SENTENCES

THEREFORE does not belong in the finished story. It belongs in the test.

THAT IS THE SPINE

Seven sentences can tell you whether the story moves.

*They cannot tell you everything the story means. That is where the rest of the
Plotliner begins.*



This is not the whole Plotliner.

Stop Writing! adds the throughline, the structure beneath the seven notes, and full worked stories. The spine tells you what happens. The rest of the method helps you discover why it matters.

Get the book at davidcornue.com/book →

THE PLOTLINER IS ONE TOOL. THE BOOK IS THE WHOLE METHOD.

Stop reading. Go find your story's spine.