

NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

OVERVIEW

That good stories have certain common traits is not an original idea – anyone who has related an anecdote that was met with blank stares; finished a story and thought, “huh?”; or tried in an English class to create a plot diagram has at least a rudimentary understanding of this concept. But identifying and recognizing the common elements and understanding the role that each element plays in a narrative is essential to being able to carefully craft one and to thoughtfully evaluate it. Sociolinguist William Labov identified six common elements that appear in a natural narrative, usually in the following order:

Of course, we begin with the essential

Controlling Idea or Framing Statement (does the job that the *divisio* does in argument)

The required elements :

1. **abstract:** a short summary, usually one or two sentences, that reveals the point of the story; the abstract lets the listener or reader know in general terms what the topic of the story is
2. **orientation:** identification of the time, place, persons, and their activity or situation; the orientation builds on the information included in the abstract and often includes a more detailed description of the main character; the orientation has the function of orienting the listener or reader to when and where the story takes place, and often how to feel towards the characters
3. **complicating action:** the first part of the core of the story, which sets up a situation that the listener or reader wants to have resolved; without a complicating action a story would not have a plot and simply be a description
4. **evaluation:** the storyteller’s commentary on why the story is tellable; in natural and personal narratives the evaluation is usually concentrated into a single area that delays the resolution, although evaluative comments may exist throughout the story; there are many different methods a storyteller can utilize to insert evaluative comments, with the best often being the most difficult to discover
5. **result or resolution:** the second part of the story’s core, which includes the final action of the story and resolves the problem introduced as the complicating action
6. **coda:** a statement to end the story, and, if it is good, leave the listener with a feeling of satisfaction and completeness