



### LAYER ONE: EXTERNAL CONFLICTS

External Conflict scenes are your verbal camera at its widest angle and it is focused on the entire stage. External conflicts test the protagonist's courage, nerves, and determination.

They are high tension scenes that focus on the question of whether the overall story goal will be achieved. They are the main actions and reactions that provide the turning points and lead directly to and include the climax of the story.

External scenes show the characters caught up in the situation of your premise such as: boy meets girl, the volcano erupts, aliens invade the town, a body has been found, they are all forced to go to a wedding or reunion, or the wagon train heads out for the wild west. They do not address the subplots unless and until the subplot collides with the main plot at the climax.

They introduce the protagonist, the inciting event, the story goal, the prize for reaching the goal, and the cost for not reaching the story goal (stakes). They show him developing and attempting a plan of action for tackling the story problem. In the usual three-act structure, his first plan fails and he must come up with a second plan (the wrong solution). That plan fails and he must come up with the third plan (the right solution).

There have to be some positive moments where it looks like the protagonist is gaining ground. You could divide them equally: five scenes where he is making headway and five scenes where he is losing ground.

List your initial thoughts on events that will happen to trigger then escalate this external conflict: snags in the plan, unexpected discoveries, reversals, gains, and increasing levels of threat. Arrange them in an order that shows cause and effect and final resolution. The first scene should contain the inciting event. The final scene should contain the climax.



**External Conflict #1:** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The verbal camera is at its widest angle. The curtain is rising. Set the stage. Draw the reader in. This is the inciting event, statement of theme, and introduction of your protagonist. The protagonist is faced with a story problem. What will he do? He may initially try to flee or ignore the problem. Introduce the secret weapon that lets us know why he, and he alone, can solve this problem. Other characters can enter the story, but the focus in on the protagonist.*

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**External Conflict #2** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The second event in the overall story problem: a skirmish, an encounter, a speech or a discussion. Introduce us to the character flaw that makes the protagonist unable to back away and will trip him up as he goes along.*

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**Scene: External conflict #3** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Skirmish, an encounter, a speech or a discussion. The first serious blow.*

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**External conflict #4** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Skirmish, an encounter, a speech or a discussion. The second complication.*

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**External conflict #5** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Skirmish, an encounter, a speech or a discussion. Protagonist fights back.*

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**External conflict #6** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Skirmish, an encounter, a speech or a discussion that gains ground.*

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**External conflict #7** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Skirmish, an encounter, a speech or a discussion that complicates the overall story problem.*

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**External conflict #8** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Skirmish, an encounter, a speech or a discussion that complicates the overall story problem.*

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**External conflict #9** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is the beginning of the end. Things have come to a head. The final, decision making event is about to take place.*

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**External conflict #10** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The final battle, effort, or confrontation occurs.*

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### LAYER TWO: ANTAGONIST CONFLICT

Antagonist Conflict scenes introduce us to the antagonist or antagonistic forces. This is your verbal camera focused on stage right.

These scenes test the protagonist's and antagonist's knowledge, ingenuity, and strength. They are battles of will and wit.

They develop how the protagonist and antagonist face off. These scenes zero in on the conflict between the two opposing characters. Other characters may be present, but the focus is on the direct confrontation between the antagonist and protagonist or the antagonist himself.

If you are following only the protagonist's POV, these scenes are where the lead alien and the hero face off, the serial killer taunts the investigator, the brothers fight over the woman, the scientists clash over the best way to thwart the meteor, or the knight and the infidel cross swords.

If the verbal camera follows the antagonist, or these scenes are written from his point of view, they show him actively pursuing his goal and reveal his personal dilemma. They show him interacting with his henchmen or threatening secondary characters.

In Antagonist scenes, he argues his side of the thematic argument. All of these conflicts lead to the climactic confrontation with the protagonist. The final scene reveals the fate of the antagonist. This is true whether you are using a negative or positive antagonist.

If you are using antagonistic forces rather than a person, these scenes show the protagonist struggling against them. If the force is nature, these scenes show the protagonist being threatened by nature. If the force is society or a controlling power, these scenes show him working against them. If the force is family disapproval, and a specific



member isn't singled out as an antagonist, then these scenes show the protagonist trying to win them over or to break their hold over him.

List ten ideas for events that will happen to escalate the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist or antagonistic forces: snags in the plan, unexpected discoveries, reversals, gains, important information concealed or revealed, and increasing levels of threat and arrange them in an order that will make the most impact. The first scene should introduce the antagonist or forces. The final scene should reveal the final disposition of the antagonist or vanquishing of the forces.  
secondary characters.

**Antagonist #1** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Focus your verbal camera on stage right. Introduce the antagonist or antagonistic force. Who is it? What do they want? What is their critical flaw or unique talent?*

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**Antagonist Conflict #2** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is either a run in with the antagonist or the antagonist working his plan, plotting with his henchmen, or the antagonistic forces are at play.*

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**Antagonist conflict #3** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is either a run in with the antagonist or the antagonist working his plan, plotting with his henchmen, or the antagonistic forces are at play.*

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**Antagonist conflict #4** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is either a run in with the antagonist or the antagonist working his plan, plotting with his henchmen, or the antagonistic forces are at play.*

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**Antagonist conflict #5** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is either a run in with the antagonist or the antagonist working his plan, plotting with his henchmen, or the antagonistic forces are at play.*

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**Antagonist conflict #6** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is either a run in with the antagonist or the antagonist working his plan, plotting with his henchmen, or the antagonistic forces are at play.*

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**Antagonist conflict #7** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is either a run in with the antagonist or the antagonist working his plan, plotting with his henchmen, or the antagonistic forces are at play.*

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**Antagonist conflict #8** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is either a run in with the antagonist or the antagonist working his plan, plotting with his henchmen, or the antagonistic forces are at play.*

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**Antagonist conflict #9** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is either a run in with the antagonist or the antagonist working his plan, plotting with his henchmen, or the antagonistic forces are at play. The lead up to the final clash.*

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**Antagonist conflict #10** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

The antagonist and protagonist face off and the outcome is decided. Antagonist exits.

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### LAYER THREE: INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Interpersonal Conflict scenes reveal how the protagonist and love interest, if applicable, are affected by friends and foes. These conflicts test the protagonist's friendships, loyalties, and will to continue.

This is your verbal camera focused on stage left. Interpersonal conflicts are the push and pull away from the action needed to solve the story problem by secondary characters.

Depending on the point of view, they can involve the friends and foes interacting with the protagonist, love interest, antagonist, or each other. Friends and foes can be used in any combination of scenes that fit with your story line. There will be both positive and negative interchanges with these characters.

Interpersonal scenes address subplots and side stories which should culminate before the climax, with everyone lined up and revealed to be on which side of the fight. Subplots should circle back to and intersect the external story problem. If they don't, you should consider cutting them.

Secondary characters should have an agenda and stakes. They want to hide, reveal, provide, or take something away. Their personal goals may be at odds with the protagonist's goal, or the antagonist's goal. Their situation may complicate the overall story problem, intentionally or unintentionally.

If you are writing in third person or shifting point of view, you can use the different viewpoints to express the friends and foes thoughts and feelings or show them taking actions the protagonist would be unaware of.

Interpersonal scenes require the most flexibility depending on the point of view you choose, the number of subplots, and the length of the story. It is easy to divide scenes among them.

List ideas for events involving secondary characters that help or hinder the protagonist or antagonist.





**Interpersonal Conflict #1** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Introduce a friend or foe who can either help or hinder. They can be neutral. If so, they should deliver a piece of information or do something to make the POV character's scene goal harder to achieve if you are following the protagonist only. If you follow a secondary character's POV, this can be their subplot, in which case they are pursuing their scene goal.*

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**Interpersonal Conflict #2** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Introduce a friend or foe who can either help or hinder. They can be neutral, if so they should deliver a piece of information or do something to make the POV character's scene goal harder to achieve if you are following the protagonist only. If you follow a secondary character's POV, this can be their subplot, in which case they are pursuing their scene goal.*

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**Interpersonal conflict#3** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Introduce a friend or foe who can either help or hinder. They can be neutral, if so they should deliver a piece of information or do something to make the POV character's scene goal harder to achieve if you are following the protagonist only. If you follow a secondary character's POV, this can be their subplot, in which case they are pursuing their scene goal.*

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**Interpersonal conflict #4** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Friend or foe either helps or hinders. If you follow a secondary character's POV, this can be their subplot, in which case they are pursuing their scene goal.*

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**Interpersonal conflict #5** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*A friend or foe either helps or hinders.*

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**Interpersonal conflict #6** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Friend or foe either helps or hinders.*

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**Interpersonal conflict #7** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Friend or foe either helps or hinders.*

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**Interpersonal conflict #8** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Friend or foe either helps or hinders. Wrap it up, dismiss them.*

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**Interpersonal conflict #9** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Friend or foe either helps or hinders. If you follow a secondary character's POV, this can be their subplot, in which case they are pursuing their scene goal. Wrap up the subplot, dismiss them.*

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**Interpersonal conflict #10** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Most important secondary characters are dismissed.*

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(In this layer, you may need many extra scenes for secondary characters. Add as needed.)

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### LAYER FOUR: INTERNAL CONFLICT

Internal Conflict scenes introduce and explore the personal dilemma your protagonist struggles with. The verbal camera is focused with a tight spotlight beaming on the protagonist in the background. Use these scenes to reveal the protagonist's back-story and show him dealing with his guilt, pain, or need which leads up to and is resolved by his point of change.

These conflicts test the protagonist's character and faith. They make him question who he is and what he does. These are the emotional complications or ties that bind that complicate the overall story problem.

If the love interest has equal weight, you can explore her personal dilemma and point of change in these scenes as well.

Internal conflict scenes can be flashbacks, dreams, and revelations of back-story through memories or an encounter with a friend or foe.

You can show him exhibiting one type of behavior in the beginning and a complete reversal of behavior at the end to show the point of change.

These scenes reveal the event that happened in the past and how it changed him: he deals with the death of his partner, the loss of his wife, the child he didn't save.

The internal conflict often culminates in the section after the climax, where we find out if the protagonist lives happily ever after. It can also culminate just prior to the climax.

That does not mean other characters cannot be in these scenes or that he is not doing anything. It means the verbal camera is zeroed in on his thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions to the underlying problem that drives him and complicates the overall story problem.

List ten ideas for events that will happen to reveal the protagonist's personal dilemma. The first scene should introduce his personal dilemma. The last scene should resolve it. If you are dividing the scenes between protagonist and love interest, list ideas for scenes that introduce and resolve her personal dilemma.



**Internal Conflict #1** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*Focus the spotlight on the protagonist's inner life. Introduce his personal dilemma. What is the issue that will make solving the story problem harder for him on a personal level?*

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**Internal Conflict #2** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The protagonist doubts himself and/or his personal dilemma is making him squirm a little.*

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**Internal conflict #3** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The protagonist doubts himself or encounters a complication of his personal dilemma.*

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**Internal conflict #4** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The protagonist's personal dilemma gets complicated.*

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**Internal conflict #5** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The protagonist's personal dilemma trips him up.*

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**Internal conflict #6** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The protagonist's personal dilemma slightly improves.*

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**Internal conflict #7** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*There is hope that he can resolve it.*

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**Internal conflict #8** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The personal dilemma worsens.*

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**Internal conflict #9** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*This is the crisis or breaking point. It looks like his personal dilemma won't be solved.*

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**Internal conflict #10** (Subject, Verb, Object, Outcome)

*The external battle is over. His personal dilemma is resolved, reveals his point of change, and he either feels good or bad about it.*

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