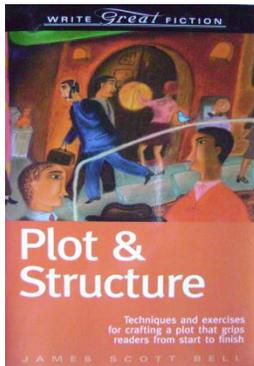


Plot & Structure

By James Scott Bell



James Scott Bell is one of my favorite authors. He is successful because he knows a lot about writing, and doesn't hesitate to share his knowledge with others.

Plot & Structure is one of the books in the "Write Great Fiction" series. It is a resource that I refer to when I'm rolling a new idea around in my head. One of Mr. Bell's points is to come up with hundreds of ideas, throw out the ones that don't stick with you, and develop the ones that do. If you think you have no ideas, then look at his list of ways to generate them. Once you have a plot idea, you write the "hook, line, and sinker" to further analyze its potential.

The next step is to get the structure right. Mr. Bell takes his time teaching about Act I, Act II, and Act III. I think these chapters are the most valuable part of the book because they are full of examples from well-known authors. When you see the structure in action, it tends to make more sense, and it is far more interesting than your high school English teacher.

Mr. Bell also talks about theme, subplots, symbols and motifs, and the pitfalls that trip writers up. He uses a LOCK system (lead, objective, confrontation, knockout) with every plot, and notes that the minor storylines should move the plot forward and not hinder it. Another requirement: write your back cover copy before starting the heavy work of the novel. It should be exciting and make people want to read your book.

The LOCK system should be used whether you outline or not. There are several suggestions for those who do outline, and those who don't, and you can even create your own hybrid version. Those who don't outline may believe that they don't need to plot at all, but Mr. Bell still pushes them to use the LOCK and record their plot journey. It doesn't make them an "outliner", but will help with revision later.

When you have finished your novel, put it away for a while, then start the edits. Mr. Bell provides checklists with questions to ask yourself as you revise. I found that if I apply those checklists, I have a stronger plot.

The last few chapters talk about the structure of the different types of plot patterns that books follow, such as the quest, revenge, love, and power. This chapter is valuable because it shows you how to set up your plot so it is effective. Mr. Bell then points out common plot problems and how to fix them.

Plot & Structure is one of the best resources I have on my shelf. I think Mr. Bell cares about helping writers succeed, as he unselfishly shares tips and techniques that can help every writer. If you think you'll never have another good idea, or if you can't quite figure out why your book isn't being accepted for publication, it could be that the plot and/or structure needs work.