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# Episodic Structure

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The Episodic plot structure is made up of a series of chapters or stories linked together by the same character, place, or theme but held apart by their individual plot, purpose, and subtext. In fact, the chapters or stories could be shuffled around and placed in a different order if desired because there is no overall beginning, middle, and end to the book or story as a whole.

In some cases there may be a sense of time passing throughout the episodes, as if the character is growing or changing through each successive chapter or story. Or perhaps the years are passing by for a character or place and we see the “seasons of change” in the background of the main plot.

The book also could be like the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series. These books have an overall theme to them, yet each chapter has a different story to illustrate that theme.

There is only a clear three-act beginning, middle, and end in each of the individual chapters or stories of an Episodic piece:



This structure can be either plot driven or character driven. Keep in mind that a “place” can be considered a character if it is the central figure in each episode.

If the story is character driven, you will most likely have at least one character showing up in every episode, using this character as the driving force in each story.

If the story is plot driven, you will see a similar character, place, or theme in each chapter or story, but the driving force will be the events within each.

## Television and Comics

Television sitcoms have an Episodic structure, and although they are comedic and may lack a coherent theme or message, each sitcom episode stands on its own. Some of the jokes require you to know a lot about the characters from previous episodes and the Main Character’s goal is often developed over time, but overall each episode can stand alone as an individual story.

Comic books fall into this category. Think of the *Wonder Woman* and *Spider-Man* comics. There are numerous episodes for each that stand on their own as individual stories.

**Elements of Plot:** See class notes

### Act I Questions

- Why have you chosen this structure?
- Will your stories be character or plot driven? Will place or theme take a significant role?
- Will you have a Turning Point in each episode?
- Will you spend time building a Villain?
- How serious will the Main Problem and/or Goal be? Is it universal?

### Act II Questions

- Will you use a scene sequence to possibly develop the Main Character’s backstory or advance the plot?
- Will the Villain be prominent in the Act?
- Will any new characters be introduced?
- What theme will you develop?
- How will you set things up for the Climax?
- Will you use a Turning Point at the end of Act II?

### Act III Questions

- How will you get your theme across to the reader in the end?
- How strong will the Villain be?
- Will things tie up neatly or be left open-ended?
- How does this story fit with the remaining stories?

## **Examples**

### Orlando, VIRGINIA WOOLF

Young nobleman Orlando is commanded by Queen Elizabeth I to stay forever young. Miraculously, he does just that. The story follows him as he moves through several centuries of British history, experiencing different ways of living and even changing sex.

### Any Small Goodness: A Novel of the Barrio, TONY JOHNSTON

Set in East Los Angeles, this novel shows the daily life of an extended Mexican-American family in a series of vignettes.

### Buffy the Vampire Slayer, JOSS WHEDON

This television series has Episodic plots that show character development throughout the seasons. Buffy grows and changes as the overall Episodic story continues each week.