How to Write GREAT SUBPLOTS

Your guide to writing better, more effective subplots for your stories.
How to use this workbook

This workbook was created to help writers craft richer, more efficient subplots for their stories.

This workbook explains what a subplot is, what a subplot shouldn't be, and what a subplot can and should involve. Following this is a list of questions that will help you analyse your subplots to determine whether or not they're pulling their weight. If at the end of the workbook you decide that any of your subplots could potentially contribute more to your stories, these questions will show you where to start.

This workbook can be used at any stage during the writing process, whether you're just beginning to explore a story idea, or you're revising your story for the hundredth time.

This workbook is not a test. There's no need to answer every single question. There's no scoring system that will tell you to completely remove a subplot if you only answer ten questions. In fact, you don't even need to write your answers down if you work more in your head than you do on paper. This workbook won't tell you that your subplots are wrong, or bad, or should be cut. It will help you find the key to unlocking their potential, and strengthening your story overall.

And if you find that a subplot's potential is to graduate to the recycle bin? That's perfectly fine. It's better to have written and scrapped than never to have written at all.
Understanding subplots

WHAT IS A SUBPLOT?

A subplot is a subordinate plot in a story. It's a secondary plot, or side story, that supports the main plot of a story.

WHAT IS A GOOD SUBPLOT?

WHEN SUBPLOTS GO BAD

When subplots are carefully and thoughtfully written, they can be an invaluable tool for telling a story. However, they're not always written under these conditions.

Subplots can be deceitful. With a little bit of character development and world building, they can make themselves seem important – important enough that their creator may fail to realise they ignore the most vital thing about storytelling: the audience.

In order to guide your reader from beginning to end, every point of your story must be engaging. Readers want to go on a journey toward a climax and resolution that they're invested in. If a reader feels as though the story is straying from the path that will take them to the most entertaining, satisfying point of the story, they will lose interest. This is why we tell writers that everything in their story must contribute to its endgame.

"Everything" includes subplots. Even if a subplot contains character development and world building, if it doesn't contribute to plot progression, it may fail to engage the reader, which could lead them to becoming bored with the book and giving up on it. Therefore, while the subplots in your stories may have purposes, those purposes may not necessarily make the subplots strong, meaningful parts of the stories they're in.

WHAT MAKES SUBPLOTS STRONG?

Strong subplots:

- are structured like miniature plots, i.e. they have a beginning, middle and ending, and involve obstacles, a climax and a resolution. They involve the main character of the subplot pursuing a goal or overcoming a conflict that is related, either directly or indirectly, to the main plot.
- contribute to the progression of the main plot, either directly or indirectly. If a strong subplot was removed from the story, the main plot would not make sense or could not unfold.
- may have one key purpose, but are utilised in a number of ways to keep the reader engaged in the story. This may include developing characters, controlling the pace, increasing the tension, and more, all achieved by the one subplot.
- are interesting! The reader should be invested in the outcome of the subplot.
THINGS A SUBPLOT CAN DO

- Develop characters, including developing their motivation, strengths and weaknesses to influence their decisions and ability to overcome the obstacles of the main plot
- Create and resolve interpersonal conflict between your characters that can help and hinder their progression through the main plot
- Tempt your protagonist away from their goal, increasing the story's tension
- Raise the stakes of the main plot or introduce new stakes
- Allow your character to learn important information that will help them through the plot
- Begin developing the plot of the next book in a series
- Slow down the pace of the story so that the main plot doesn't progress too quickly
- All of the above!

Can you think of more?

- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
- ____________________________________________
Crafting strong subplots

OVERVIEW

WHO ARE SUBPLOTS ABOUT?
Subplots can be about the protagonist of the story, or another character.

WHAT CAN A SUBPLOT ADD TO THE STORY?
Subplots can add complexity to a story that cannot be achieved through the main plot. This can come in the form of character development, world building, conflict development and giving the story a deeper context and meaning.

WHAT SHOULD A SUBPLOT ADD TO THE STORY?
Subplots should be crucial to the main plot in some way, as everything in a story should do its part to contribute to the progression toward the endgame. If the subplot is removed, the main plot should either be very different, or should not be able to progress. The ways that a subplot contributes to the main plot do not have to be obvious, but they do have to exist.

HOW SHOULD SUBPLOTS BE STRUCTURED?
Like all plots, subplots should have a beginning, middle and ending. Plots are divided into these acts because they take the reader on a journey from introduction to conclusion. In the beginning, a reader's interest is piqued. During the middle, that interest is deepened until the reader is invested in the outcome of the story. The ending is where this outcome unfolds, and the conflict of the story is resolved.

THE BEGINNING

SET-UP
The set-up takes place before the characters are actively involved in the subplot. It’s a way of subtly indicating to readers that a particular detail, event, etc. will be explored further as the story progresses.

Readers love to be surprised, but they hate plot holes and things that come way out of left field. Setting up the components of your story, however briefly, will help keep readers grounded in the story when these components are officially introduced. This includes subplots.

INTRODUCTION
The introduction is the point at which the characters, or the main character of the subplot at the very least, become involved in the subplot. This is where they first run into the problem that the subplot centres around; make the goal that is separate from, but relevant to, the main plot; or find that a new door has opened for them.
GOALS
Plots usually involve either a character encountering a problem and finding a way to overcome it, or setting a goal and finding a way to achieve it. Subplots are no different. In the beginning of the subplot, it should be established which is the case for the main character of the subplot, and it should be made clear to the reader what the goal or conflict of the subplot is. This goal or conflict may be redefined as the subplot progresses, but the main character of the subplot needs to be striving toward something after the subplot is introduced.

Subplots will likely involve more than one character, and each will have their own goals or problems to work toward. The goals and conflicts of other characters may also be redefined as the subplot progresses, but it's important for these desires to be established in the beginning, in a way that makes them clear to the reader, as the choices characters make greatly influence the way that plots unfold.

STAKES
Stakes are the possible outcomes of the subplot. What is the main character's desired outcome of tackling their goal or problem? What would happen if they achieved this? What would happen if they failed to achieve this? These stakes are what they're fighting for. These stakes are why the characters choose to participate in the subplot.

Each character involved in the subplot will have their own stakes to fight for. The stakes may be redefined as the subplot progresses, but they should be established in the beginning, in a way that makes them clear to the reader, as the choices characters make greatly influence the way that plots unfold.

MOTIVATIONS
Motivations are the reasons that the stakes are important to the characters. They are the reasons that the characters can't or won't turn their backs on their role in the subplot.

Each character involved in the subplot will have their own motivations. The motivations may be redefined as the subplot progresses, but they should be established in the beginning, in a way that makes them clear to the reader, as the choices characters make greatly influence the way that plots unfold.

INFLUENCING THE PLOT
Subplots should directly or indirectly influence the main plot. The introduction of the subplot may influence the main plot, but it does not need to.

ENGAGING THE READER
Readers should be interested in subplots as well as main plots. The introduction of the subplot should create some interest, whether it is through the goal or conflict of the subplot, or the stakes and motivations of the characters involved.
THE MIDDLE

OBSTACLES
Just like main plots, subplot should involve obstacles that stand in the main character’s way of achieving their goal or overcoming their conflict. These obstacles should become more difficult as the subplot progresses, and have higher stakes.

INFLUENCING THE PLOT
Subplots should directly or indirectly influence the main plot. If the beginning of the subplot didn’t influence the main plot, then the middle should try to.

ENGAGING THE READER
Readers should be interested in subplots as well as main plots. The middle should build on the interest created in the beginning so that the reader is invested in the outcome of the subplot and feels the tension created by the obstacles. Each obstacle should have more tension than the previous.

THE END

THE CLIMAX
Just like main plots, the events of a subplot should build toward a climactic point. During this climax, where the subplot’s tension is at its highest, the main character achieves their goal or overcomes their conflict, or fails to do either.

THE RESOLUTION
The resolution is the aftermath of the climax, where all (or most, if there will be a sequel) loose ends are tied up.

INFLUENCING THE PLOT
Subplots should directly or indirectly influence the main plot. If the beginning and middle of the subplot did not influence the main plot, either directly or indirectly, then the ending needs to.

ENGAGING THE READER
The climax and resolution should form a satisfying ending for the reader, even if it’s surprising and bittersweet. The reader should be satisfied with the loose ends that are tied up, even if some are left dangling so they can be explored in a sequel.
Crafting strong subplots – worksheet

Example worksheet using a subplot from Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone by J. K. Rowling

OVERVIEW

What is the subplot?
Quidditch

Which character is the focus of the subplot?
Harry

Which other characters are involved in the subplot?
Malfoy, McGonagall, Oliver Wood

How significant are the roles of other characters in the subplot?
Malfoy motivates Harry.
McGonagall offers Harry the chance to participate in the subplot.
The outcome of the subplot is deeply important to Wood, influencing the way it unfolds.

What does the subplot add to the story?
Pacing; emotional satisfaction from seeing Harry succeed and find his place in the wizarding world; teaching Harry a skill that he uses in the climax, without which he can't resolve the main plot; character development; character relationships; setting up situations for Harry to learn plot information.

Why is this important?
Slows the story so that it doesn't move too quickly, allowing the reader to stay engaged; emotional satisfaction engages the reader so they feel more invested in the story and will enjoy it more and keep reading to see if the outcome they want is achieved; the plot could have been written in a way that didn't involve using this skill, but it is satisfying to see Harry use the strength he has found in his new life to succeed in saving the wizarding world; Harry's character is developed through the main plot but this subplot allows other places for his character to develop as plot progression is slow, and Quidditch lets the reader get to know Harry on a normal-boy level not a hero level,
which makes him more relatable and easier to sympathise with, and thus easier to be engaged in his story and want to see him succeed; the protagonist doesn’t drive the plot in a vacuum, character relationships help dictate the way the story unfolds, such as his rivalry with Malfoy; the plot isn’t one that Harry can pursue without information to do so, but no one gives him this information so he has to find it out in other ways.

**Why can’t this be added through the main plot?**

There’s not enough to the main plot to allow it to stretch across the narrative time or book length; the main plot doesn’t give him any opportunities to learn a skill as it mostly involves learning information; the main plot is about saving the world from Voldemort so the reader can’t get to know Harry outside of the hero context through the main plot; the main plot often doesn’t bring him into contact with other characters that could influence his decisions; no one directly tells Harry anything about the plot so he needs a way to be able to pursue the plot or it wouldn’t progress at all.

**How does the subplot contribute to the main plot?**

Harry learns skills that help him get through an obstacle in the climax; it gives him a way to bond with his father which creates an emotional context that motivates him to thwart Voldemort; it sets up situations that lead to learning plot information.

**How does the main plot directly rely on the subplot?**

A lot of the information Harry needs to learn to navigate the plot is revealed in situations created by Quidditch, e.g. suspecting Snape of trying to kill Harry during his first Quidditch match.

**How does the main plot indirectly rely on the subplot?**

A lot of the information Harry needs to learn to navigate the plot is revealed in situations created by Quidditch, e.g. Harry joining the Gryffindor Quidditch team motivates Malfoy to challenge Harry to a duel, which ultimately leads Harry to discovering the trapdoor beneath Fluffy and suspecting that the package Hagrid took from Gringotts is beneath it.
How would the main plot be different if the subplot wasn’t in the story?
Harry would not have been able to attempt to stop Voldemort from stealing the Philosopher’s Stone as he would not have any of information needed to do so.

Are there any other consequences for removing the subplot from the story?
The story would be paced too quickly for the reader to be engaged and there would be less investment from the reader because there would be less emotional engagement and satisfaction from seeing Harry succeed in the subplot.

BEGINNING

How far into the story is the subplot set up?
A quarter of the way through the book, the chapter that Harry first enters the wizarding world after finding out that he’s a wizard.

How is the subplot set up?
Malfoy mentions Quidditch when they first meet, making Harry feel insecure about how much he doesn’t know about the wizarding world.

How far into the story does the subplot begin?
Just before halfway.

How does the subplot begin?
Flying lessons. Harry flies and dives after Neville’s Remembrall due to his rivalry with Malfoy and his character, and as a result he is put on the Gryffindor Quidditch team as Seeker.

How does the introduction of the subplot directly influence the main plot?

How does the introduction of the subplot indirectly influence the main plot?
Because Harry being put on the Gryffindor Quidditch team is the opposite of what Malfoy wants, Malfoy challenges Harry to a duel. This course of events leads Harry to discovering Fluffy and the trapdoor, and he suspects that the package Hagrid took from Gringotts is beneath the trapdoor.
PROTAGONIST

What does the subplot initially mean to the protagonist?

It deepens the rivalry between him and Malfoy, becoming an outlet for Harry's desire to one-up Malfoy. Harry is also glad to find something he's good at, feeling more secure at Hogwarts because of it.

How is this demonstrated?

Rivalry with Malfoy – "Harry had never believed he would meet a boy he hated more than Dudley, but that was before he met Draco Malfoy." / "'Typical,' Harry said darkly. 'Just what I always wanted. To make a fool of myself on a broomstick in front of Malfoy."

Overcoming feelings of inadequacy – quote as above; Harry initially feels like Hagrid must have made a mistake about Harry being a wizard as he's so ordinary. Then many interactions (Malfoy, Snape) make him feel inadequate, even though there are assertions that he shouldn't be expected to know anything about magic. When he gets on a broomstick for the first time, he notes how natural it feels and thinks he's finally found something he's good at.

What is the initial desired outcome of the subplot for the protagonist?

To not make a fool of himself in front of Malfoy; to be good at Quidditch so he can prove that he's more than a famous name.

How is this demonstrated?

"'Typical,' Harry said darkly. 'Just what I always wanted. To make a fool of myself on a broomstick in front of Malfoy.". He mentions making a fool of himself, and doing so in front of Malfoy. Also with Harry's response to Malfoy's reaction at finding out that Harry has been put on the team, and Harry's fear that he will make a fool out of himself during his first match.

How will/would achieving this outcome directly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to achieve this outcome directly affect the main plot?
How will/would achieving this outcome indirectly affect the main plot?

After Harry is put on the Quidditch team, Malfoy gets angry and challenges him to a duel, which ultimately leads to Harry suspecting where the package from Gringotts is.

How will/would failing to achieve this outcome indirectly affect the main plot?

Harry wouldn’t discover the abovementioned information.

What are the other consequences of achieving the outcome?

The emotional payoff of Malfoy not getting what he wants.

What are the other consequences of failing to achieve the outcome?

Missing the abovementioned.

What is the protagonist’s initial motivation for their role in the subplot?

Rivalry with Malfoy; feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

How is this demonstrated?

Harry’s thought processes about Malfoy and about feeling out of place in the wizarding world because he doesn’t know anything about magic.

MAIN CHARACTER N/A

This section is only relevant if the main character of the subplot is not the protagonist of the main plot.

What does the subplot mean to the main character of the subplot?

How is this demonstrated?

What is the initial desired outcome of the subplot for the main character of the subplot?

How is this demonstrated?

How will/would achieving this outcome directly affect the main plot?
How will/would failing to achieve this outcome directly affect the main plot?

How will/would achieving this outcome indirectly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to achieve this outcome indirectly affect the main plot?

What are the other consequences of achieving the outcome?

What are the other consequences of failing to achieve the outcome?

What is initial motivation for the main character of the subplot?

How is this demonstrated?

OTHER CHARACTERS

What does the subplot initially mean to the other characters involved in the subplot?

Malfoy doesn’t want Harry or Gryffindor to succeed; McGonagall and Wood want to win the House Cup.

How is this demonstrated?

Malfoy is a Slytherin with an established rivalry with Harry; McGonagall doesn’t expel Harry for flying when he wasn’t allowed to, and bends the rules so Harry can get on the team and have a broomstick; Wood’s delight at having a good seeker. “The Quidditch Cup’ll have our name on it this year.”

What are the initial desired outcomes of the subplot for the other characters involved in the subplot?

Malfoy wants to see Harry fail; McGonagall and Wood want Gryffindor to win the House Cup.
How is this demonstrated?
The way Harry and Malfoy interact; the comments McGonagall and Wood make about the House Cup.

How will/would achieving these outcomes directly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to achieve these outcomes directly affect the main plot?

How will/would achieving these outcomes indirectly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to achieve these outcomes indirectly affect the main plot?
Malfoy not getting what he wants motivates him to challenge Harry to the duel that leads to Harry learning plot information.

What are the other consequences of achieving these outcomes?
The emotional payoff of winning and losing for all involved.

What are the other consequences of failing to achieve these outcomes?

What are the initial motivations for the other characters involved in the subplot?
Rivalry and competition.

How is this demonstrated?
Through dialogue and their reactions to their rivals succeeding.

THE READER

What is the intended initial desired outcome of the subplot for the reader?
To see Harry succeed at finding his place in the wizarding world and beating Malfoy.

How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?
The way Harry has grown up and how thoughts are written make him relatable and easy to sympathise with, so the reader wants him to succeed and be happy. Malfoy is
immediately written to be an unlikable character due to his dialogue and the way he
treats people, so the reader wants to see Harry beat him.

**MIDDLE**

**OBSTACLE 1**

What is the obstacle?
The first Quidditch match – Gryffindor v Slytherin.

At what point of the story is the obstacle introduced?
Just over halfway.

How is the obstacle introduced?
Harry is feeling nervous about the first match.

How does the introduction of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How does the introduction of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?
To calm his nerves, Harry is reading a book about Quidditch, which Snape confiscates.
When Harry goes to ask for it back, it is revealed that Snape was bitten by Fluffy,
leading Harry to believe that he let the troll into the school to create a diversion so that
he could get past Fluffy and get the package.

How will/would overcoming the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle directly affect main plot?

How will/would overcoming the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?
How is the reader intended to feel about the introduction of the obstacle?

The reader is intended to feel anxious about the obstacle.

How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

Through the relationship they've established with Harry and how anxious he is. The reader is intended to sympathise with him and want what he wants.

How soon is the obstacle overcome?

Within the chapter it's introduced in.

How does the resolution of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

They discuss the match with Hagrid, which leads to him revealing that the dog, Fluffy, is his, and that the package he guards is related to Nicolas Flamel.

How is the reader intended to feel about the resolution of the obstacle?

Happy, as Harry is.

How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

Because of their relationship with Harry and how happy he is.

How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the protagonist by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

Harry wants even more now to win the Quidditch Cup and the House Cup, as the first hurdle has been overcome and he now knows he can win a match. He no longer feels insecure because he thinks about how no one can think he's just a famous name anymore. The emotional context has shifted from Harry fitting in, to Harry winning the Cup.

How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist) by the point that the obstacle is resolved?
How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for other characters involved in the subplot by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

_Malfoy is further motivated to get the better of Harry._

How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot directly affect the main plot?

How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot indirectly affect the main plot?

How has the plot progressed by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

_The trio suspect that Snape was trying to get past Fluffy on Halloween to take the package, and tried to kill Harry during the Quidditch match. They find out that Fluffy is Hagrid’s and the package he is guarding has something to do with Nicolas Flamel._

How engaged in the subplot is the reader intended to be at the resolution of the obstacle?

_They’re intended to want to see Harry go on to win the Cup._

**OBSTACLE 2**

What is the obstacle?

_The next match._

At what point of the story is the obstacle introduced?

_Just under three quarters of the way through the book._

How is the obstacle introduced?

How does the introduction of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How does the introduction of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How will/would overcoming the obstacle directly affect the main plot?
How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle directly affect main plot?

How will/would overcoming the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How is the reader intended to feel about the introduction of the obstacle?
Wanting to see Harry succeed.

How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?
Through Harry – "If they won their next match, against Hufflepuff, they would overtake Slytherin in the House Championship for the first time in seven years."

How does this obstacle build off of the previous?
It's part of the same competition, but now winning means more because the result they want is closer to being able to be achieved.

How has the tension increased at this point of the subplot?
Winning the match means more now as they are closer to winning the Cup. Additionally, Snape is refereeing the next match and he is both head of Slytherin and presumably tried to kill Harry in the last match: "The idea of overtaking Slytherin in the House Championship was wonderful, no one had done it for nearly seven years, but would they be allowed to, with such a biased referee?" increases the tension as it makes it seem like they are not likely to win. Additionally, since they think Snape tried to kill Harry in the last match, it's possible that this obstacle may have greater consequences than the last.

How soon is the obstacle overcome?
Within the same chapter it's introduced in.

How does the resolution of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How does the resolution of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?
How is the reader intended to feel about the resolution of the obstacle?

Happy that Harry won again.

How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

Through Harry.

How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the protagonist by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

He is now in an advantageous position to achieve the desired outcome.

How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist) by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for other characters involved in the subplot by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot directly affect the main plot?

How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot indirectly affect the main plot?

How has the plot progressed by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

Harry is taking his broomstick back to the broom shed when he follows Snape and overhears a conversation that confirms that Fluffy is guarding the Philosopher’s Stone and that teachers are too, including Quirrell. This leads Harry to think that it is only a matter of time before Snape has the Stone.

How engaged in the subplot is the reader intended to be at the resolution of the obstacle?
OBSTACLE 3

What is the obstacle?

At what point of the story is the obstacle introduced?

How is the obstacle introduced?

How does the introduction of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How does the introduction of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How will/would overcoming the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle directly affect main plot?

How will/would overcoming the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How is the reader intended to feel about the introduction of the obstacle?

How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

How does this obstacle build off of the previous?

How has the tension increased at this point of the subplot?
How soon is the obstacle overcome?

How does the resolution of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How does the resolution of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How is the reader intended to feel about the resolution of the obstacle?

How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the protagonist by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist) by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for other characters involved in the subplot by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot directly affect the main plot?

How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot indirectly affect the main plot?

How has the plot progressed by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

How engaged in the subplot is the reader intended to be at the resolution of the obstacle?
What is the final obstacle?
The Quidditch final.

At what point of the story is the final obstacle introduced?
After the climax.

How is the final obstacle introduced?
Harry is told about it as he is recovering in the hospital wing.

How does the introduction of the final obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How does the introduction of the final obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How will/would overcoming the final obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to overcome the final obstacle directly affect main plot?

How will/would overcoming the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

How is the reader intended to feel about the introduction of the final obstacle?
Frustrated that Harry didn't get to play and go on to win the House Cup as he wanted, but mostly content since the main plot has been resolved, and Harry made that a higher priority than Quidditch.
How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

The subplot built up to a point where winning the House Cup was in reach, and the satisfaction of seeing that come to be was taken away. However, the reader is intended to be satisfied that Harry chose to thwart Voldemort and succeeded.

How do all previous obstacles build to this final obstacle?

As it is a competition, it was always going to lead to a final. The previous obstacles made Harry's goal seem easier to reach.

How is this the tensest part of the subplot for the protagonist?

It was the final, so it was the point where the stakes were the highest.

How is this the tensest part of the subplot for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist)?

How is this the tensest part of the subplot for the other characters involved in the subplot?

They were all invested in the outcome of the match because it would decide who would win the House Cup and Quidditch Cup, and all parties wanted to win both.

How is this the tensest part of the subplot for the reader?

It wasn't, as it did not involve Harry and priorities had shifted to the main plot.

How soon is the final obstacle overcome?

It happened "off-screen".

How does the resolution of the final obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How does the resolution of the final obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?
How is the reader intended to feel about the resolution of the final obstacle?

Satisfied, as even though they thought the desired outcome hadn’t been achieved, Dumbledore ensures that Gryffindor still wins the House Cup as a reward for all Harry went through.

How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

Through the writing and Harry’s thoughts: glum about Slytherin winning, and then ecstatic when Gryffindor win.

How has the context of the story changed for the protagonist by the point that the final obstacle is resolved?

How has the context of the story changed for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist) by the point that the final obstacle is resolved?

How has the context of the story changed for other characters involved in the subplot by the point that the final obstacle is resolved?

How does this contextual shift directly affect the main plot?

How does this contextual indirectly affect the main plot?

How has the plot progressed by the point that the final obstacle is resolved?

How far into the story is the subplot resolved?

Right at the end, during the resolution of the main plot.

How has this subplot progressed the main plot?

By putting Harry in situations where he can learn the information he needs to know in order to save the Philosopher’s Stone from Voldemort in the third act.
How are the loose ends of the subplot tied up?

During the resolution when Harry finds out what happened in the last match, and when Dumbledore gives out the points that give Gryffindor the House Cup.
Crafting strong subplots – worksheet

OVERVIEW

What is the subplot?

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Which character is the focus of the subplot?

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Which other characters are involved in the subplot?

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How significant are the roles of other characters in the subplot?

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What does the subplot add to the story?

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Why is this important?

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Why can't this be added through the main plot?

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How does the subplot contribute to the main plot?

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How does the main plot directly rely on the subplot?

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How does the main plot indirectly rely on the subplot?

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How would the main plot be different if the subplot wasn’t in the story?

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Are there any other consequences for removing the subplot from the story?

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BEGINNING

How far into the story is the subplot set up?

How is the subplot set up?

How far into the story does the subplot begin?
How does the subplot begin?
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How does the introduction of the subplot directly influence the main plot?
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How does the introduction of the subplot indirectly influence the main plot?
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PROTAGONIST

What does the subplot initially mean to the protagonist?

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How is this demonstrated?

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What is the initial desired outcome of the subplot for the protagonist?

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How is this demonstrated?

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How will/would achieving this outcome directly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to achieve this outcome directly affect the main plot?

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How will/would achieving this outcome indirectly affect the main plot?


How will/would failing to achieve this outcome indirectly affect the main plot?


What are the other consequences of achieving the outcome?


What are the other consequences of failing to achieve the outcome?

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What is the protagonist's initial motivation for their role in the subplot?

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How is this demonstrated?

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MAIN CHARACTER

This section is only relevant if the main character of the subplot is not the protagonist of the main plot.

What does the subplot mean to the main character of the subplot?

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How is this demonstrated?

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What is the initial desired outcome of the subplot for the main character of the subplot?

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How is this demonstrated?

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How will/would achieving this outcome directly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to achieve this outcome directly affect the main plot?

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How will/would achieving this outcome indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to achieve this outcome indirectly affect the main plot?

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What are the other consequences of achieving the outcome?

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What are the other consequences of failing to achieve the outcome?

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What is initial motivation for the main character of the subplot?

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How is this demonstrated?

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OTHER CHARACTERS

What does the subplot initially mean to the other characters involved in the subplot?

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How is this demonstrated?

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What are the initial desired outcomes of the subplot for the other characters involved in the subplot?

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How is this demonstrated?

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How will/would achieving these outcomes directly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to achieve these outcomes directly affect the main plot?

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How will/would achieving these outcomes indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to achieve these outcomes indirectly affect the main plot?

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What are the other consequences of achieving these outcomes?

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What are the other consequences of failing to achieve these outcomes?

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What are the initial motivations for the other characters involved in the subplot?

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How is this demonstrated?

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THE READER

What is the intended initial desired outcome of the subplot for the reader?

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How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

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MIDDLE

OBSTACLE 1

What is the obstacle?

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At what point of the story is the obstacle introduced?

How is the obstacle introduced?

How does the introduction of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?
How does the introduction of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would overcoming the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle directly affect main plot?

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How will/would overcoming the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How is the reader intended to feel about the introduction of the obstacle?

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How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

How soon is the obstacle overcome?

How does the resolution of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?
How does the resolution of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How is the reader intended to feel about the resolution of the obstacle?

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How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

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How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the protagonist by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist) by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for other characters involved in the subplot by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot directly affect the main plot?

How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot indirectly affect the main plot?

How has the plot progressed by the point that the obstacle is resolved?
How engaged in the subplot is the reader intended to be at the resolution of the obstacle?

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OBSTACLE 2

What is the obstacle?

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At what point of the story is the obstacle introduced?

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How is the obstacle introduced?

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How does the introduction of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

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How does the introduction of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would overcoming the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle directly affect main plot?

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How will/would overcoming the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How is the reader intended to feel about the introduction of the obstacle?

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How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

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How does this obstacle build off of the previous?

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How has the tension increased at this point of the subplot?

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How soon is the obstacle overcome?

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How does the resolution of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

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How does the resolution of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How is the reader intended to feel about the resolution of the obstacle?

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How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

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How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the protagonist by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist) by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for other characters involved in the subplot by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot directly affect the main plot?

How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot indirectly affect the main plot?
How has the plot progressed by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How engaged in the subplot is the reader intended to be at the resolution of the obstacle?

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OBSTACLE 3

What is the obstacle?

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At what point of the story is the obstacle introduced?

How is the obstacle introduced?

How does the introduction of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?
How does the introduction of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would overcoming the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How is the reader intended to feel about the introduction of the obstacle?

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How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

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How does this obstacle build off of the previous?

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How has the tension increased at this point of the subplot?

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How soon is the obstacle overcome?

How does the resolution of the obstacle directly affect the main plot?

How does the resolution of the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?
How is the reader intended to feel about the resolution of the obstacle?

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How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

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How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the protagonist by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist) by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How has the goal, motivation or context of the subplot changed for other characters involved in the subplot by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot directly affect the main plot?

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How do any changes to the goals, motivations and context of the subplot indirectly affect the main plot?

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How has the plot progressed by the point that the obstacle is resolved?

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How engaged in the subplot is the reader intended to be at the resolution of the obstacle?

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What is the final obstacle?

At what point of the story is the final obstacle introduced?

How is the final obstacle introduced?
How does the introduction of the final obstacle directly affect the main plot?

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How does the introduction of the final obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would overcoming the final obstacle directly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to overcome the final obstacle directly affect main plot?

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How will/would overcoming the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How will/would failing to overcome the obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How is the reader intended to feel about the introduction of the final obstacle?

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How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

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How do all previous obstacles build to this final obstacle?

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How is this the tensest part of the subplot for the protagonist?

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How is this the tensest part of the subplot for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist)?

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How is this the tensest part of the subplot for the other characters involved in the subplot?

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How is this the tensest part of the subplot for the reader?

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How soon is the final obstacle overcome?

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How does the resolution of the final obstacle directly affect the main plot?

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How does the resolution of the final obstacle indirectly affect the main plot?

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How is the reader intended to feel about the resolution of the final obstacle?

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How is the reader encouraged to feel this way?

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How has the context of the story changed for the protagonist by the point that the final obstacle is resolved?

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How has the context of the story changed for the main character of the subplot (if not the protagonist) by the point that the final obstacle is resolved?

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How has the context of the story changed for other characters involved in the subplot by the point that the final obstacle is resolved?

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How does this contextual shift directly affect the main plot?

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How does this contextual indirectly affect the main plot?

How has the plot progressed by the point that the final obstacle is resolved?

How far into the story is the subplot resolved?
How has this subplot progressed the main plot?

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How are the loose ends of the subplot tied up?

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