

SITUATION MAPPING

SOURCE: *Structuring Your Novel*, Robert C. Meredith and John D. Fitzgerald
(New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1993).

Situation: The relative position or combination of circumstances at a certain moment; a critical, trying or unusual state of affairs; a particular or striking complex of affairs at a stage in the action of a narrative or drama. A situation grows out of the circumstances of life--the collision of circumstances of a character trying to reach a goal and encountering conflict.

I. Conceive a situation

- A. A situation can be the basis for an entire story, chapter, or scene.
- B. Example: "A married middle-aged businessman, Frank Cheever, falls in love with a pretty young woman twenty years his younger and takes her as his mistress."

II. Supply the motivation

- A. You must supply the motivation--the why--for everything your characters say and do.
- B. The protagonist's chief motivating force (internal motivation) supplies most of his motivation, which is directed at achieving his tangible objective (external goal). See "From Idea to Plot."

- C. Example: "Frank Cheever's chief motivating force is a determination to build himself a financial empire with the tangible objective of taking over his competitors' companies."
- D. What's the best way to establish character motivation in the reader's mind?
- i. Interior monologue
 - ii. Dialogue with another character
 - iii. Let the viewpoint narrator speculate about the character's motivation.
 - iv. Let another character simply ask what the motivation is.
 - v. Use an adverb or adverbial phrase, although sparingly. Examples:
 1. "I don't drink," he said belligerently.
 2. "I don't drink," he said, accenting the word *don't* as if he believed that anybody who did drink had to be a drunkard.

III. To break down the situation, answer the following questions:

- A. Who are the characters involved in the situation?
- B. Where does the situation take place?
- C. What is the main event or incident during the situation?
- D. When does this event happen?
- E. Why does this event happen?

F. Example:

- i. Who: The characters are Frank Cheever, his wife Nora, and a girl named Ann Fields who becomes Frank's mistress.
- ii. Where: The situation takes place in Frank's home, his office, a meeting place with Ann Fields, and in the apartment he rents for her.
- iii. What: The main event of the situation is Frank Cheever's taking as his mistress a girl twenty years younger than he is.
- iv. When: The situation occurs in the present, in the time period of the chapter.
- v. Why: This is the key question, which must be made believable through motivation. This event occurs because... his sex life with Nora isn't good, his relationship with her isn't any better, Ann is an attractive woman in his office who gives him attention, and Ann is on the make and wants wealth and position, having designs on becoming Mrs. Frank Cheever.

IV. Break down the situation into exposition, description, narration, and action.

- A. By supplying motivation (why), you can visualize what you need to convey to the reader.
- B. Identify that information by exposition, description, narration, and especially action. Break these into incidents or scenes.
- C. Example:
 - i. Scene between Frank and Nora that shows their unhappiness and dying relationship.
 - ii. Scene to portray how attractive Ann is and how she flirts with Frank, and how Frank notices and is attracted to her.
 - iii. Scene where Frank takes Ann to lunch and propositions her to become his mistress; she agrees.
 - iv. Scene in the apartment that Frank rents for Ann for their love nest.

Situation Mapping: Worksheet

The situation in my novel is... [\(I.\)](#)

What is your character's chief motivating force? His tangible objective? [\(II.B.\)](#)

How does the character's motivation and goal relate to this situation?

Break down the situation with the "Five Ws": [\(III., III.F.\)](#)

Who are the characters involved in the situation?

Where does the situation take place?

What is the main event or incident during the situation?

When does this event happen?

Why does this event happen? This event occurs **because**...

Break down the W information into scenes. What is the best way to relay that information--exposition, description, narration, action? [\(IV.\)](#)