

Sub-Plotting

The More Plots, the Merrier

A sure-fire way to guarantee that there is enough action in your novel to fill the pages, meet your word count, and keep your readers reading is to add subplots starring your supporting characters. Just like your protagonist and antagonist, your supporting characters have dreams, fears, and weaknesses of their own.

If your protagonist wants to travel to Chicago for the freestyle hip-hop competitions to fulfill his dream of becoming a performer, perhaps his best friend wants to become a chef and is coming along for Chicago's world-famous, five-star restaurants.

Since you may have more than one supporting character, complete the following for each of them on a separate sheet of paper:

More than anything in the world, _____ wants:
Supporting character's name

But he/she is afraid of:

And his/her greatest weakness is:



Watching TV is a great way to learn about subplots. Shows like *The Simpsons* are filled with them. Episodes aren't always about Homer or Bart. Lisa, Marge, and even Maggie have adventures of their own that weave in and out of the main plot line. For this reason, we would like you to take a break from noveling and watch some TV. Don't get too excited though. You're not totally off the hook . . .

You have to choose a fictional show—meaning no reality-TV shows—and it can't be a show you really like. Otherwise, you will get too lost in the episode to pay attention to the assignment. Which is to sit down in front of the tube, put your thinking cap on, and write down answers to the following questions in your notebook:

1. Who is the protagonist?
2. How many supporting characters are there? Who are they? And how are they related to the protagonist?

3. What are the subplots? These are the plots that involve the supporting characters going after something they want. They may include the protagonist, but sometimes the protagonist has little to no connection to the subplot.

4. Do the supporting characters have their own antagonists? Or are they also battling the protagonist's antagonist?

As you probably noticed, within the main plot of the show, the writers have inserted several minor plots involving the supporting characters. Now that you know about your supporting characters' hopes and fears, you can add subplots to your own story.

Anytime you feel stuck or bored with your protagonist, go see what your supporting characters are up to. You can totally switch gears and follow their journeys whenever you'd like. Maybe they'll run into your protagonist, maybe they won't. No matter what happens, we promise that all kinds of unexpected things will unfold each time you explore a subplot.