

Mythulu

# FRACTAL PLOTTING

LAURA CRENSHAW



PERFECTLY PACED STORIES  
EVERY TIME



# FRACTAL PLOTTING

An improv-compatible method for perfect pacing  
and preventing scope creep.

LAURA CRENSHAW

I love discovery writing—aka "pantsing". Charging into a blank page and giving your characters full control often yields vibrant, authentic interactions. Characters aren't being coerced into your agenda because you have no agenda. I believe discovery writing is an essential skill.

But you know what sucks? Rewriting. It's slow and demoralizing to cut scenes you never needed. And the worst feeling of all is writing a fabulous 190K novel you can't sell.

I pantsed my first NaNoWriMo, "won", and then spent 14 years trying to edit that story down into a sellable debut. News flash: You can't be a pro writer at that speed.

To save my career, I discovered Two-Peak Plot and invented Fractal Plotting. These two methods together create juuuuuuust enough structure to:

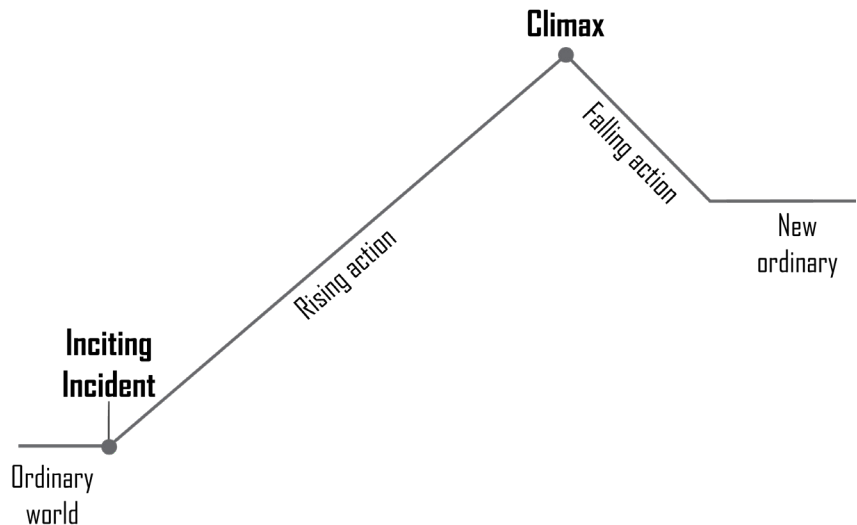
- Never write chapters you don't need.
- Pace perfectly—especially in the middle.
- Nail the target word count, every time.

## OLD PLOT METHOD

This is a traditional plot map, in case you've never seen one. It was invented 150 years ago and hasn't changed much since.

It's great for introducing 3rd graders to creative writing, but it has two weaknesses:

- It's painfully predictable
- Authors get lost in that "rising action" middle.



### Ordinary World -

Introductory phase, where you establish what is "normal" in your world and in your character's life.

### Inciting Incident -

Change that forces the protagonist into action. Makes it impossible to return to the life they had.

### Climax -

Confrontation of the story's big bad problem. Your main character makes their last big choice.

### New Ordinary -

New daily norms are established. Series and character arcs resolve. The world comes to rest.

## TWO-PEAK PLOT

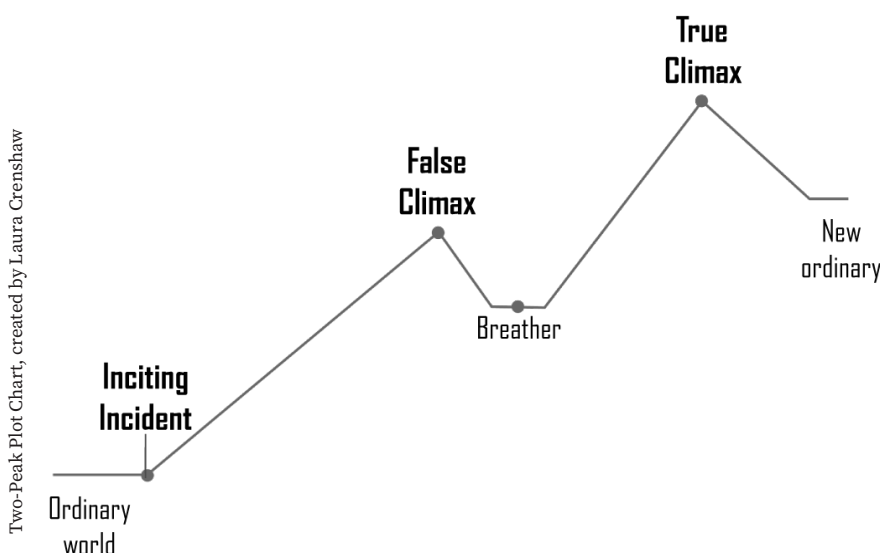
**Two-Peak plots define that middle and build a "surprise" twist into every story.**

Readers can see your traditional climax coming a mile away. So instead of saving it for the end, we sprint breakneck style toward

their expectations, hitting them halfway into the story. That's your false climax.

The false climax exposes a bigger, nastier problem that jeopardizes your hero's willingness to continue. In response, the hero takes a breather.

Breathers let your hero be a coward for a minute, which humanizes them.



### False Climax -

The victory or conflict your readers can see coming. Exposes a bigger problem.

### Breather -

Hero gets a chance to walk away and seriously considers it. Ends when they recommit.



## FRACTAL PLOTTING

This is where things get AWESOME.

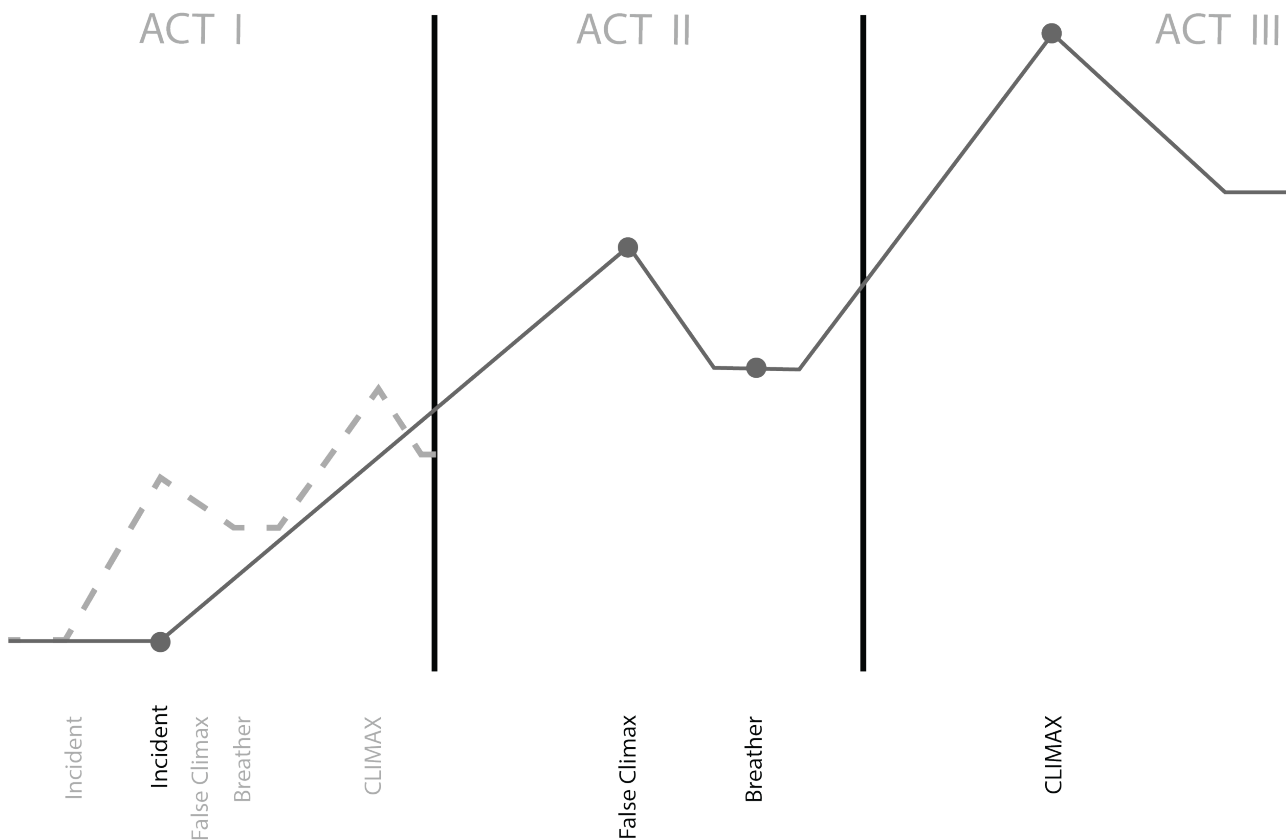
Plot charts don't just apply to the story as a whole. They ALSO apply to every Act.

...and every chapter. And every character. And your series as a whole.

When you apply the two-peak plot chart to Act I, in addition to the whole story, you get this:

Now Act I has TWO inciting events. Incident 1 occurs early and often looks innocent, but gets things rolling. It leads to Incident 2, which is a BIG event—like the farm burning down—and makes it impossible for the protagonist to keep living their old life.

Notice how Incident 2 (the main plot's inciting event) lines up with Act I's False Climax. This is the same event dual-purposed.

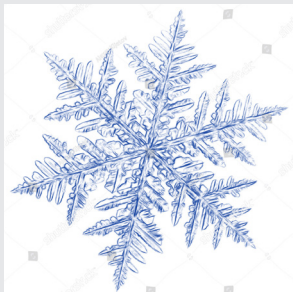


Three-Act story with Two-Peak plot overlaid—Once for the entire story, and again for Act One.

### WHAT'S A FRACTAL?

A Fractal is a curve or geometric figure, where each part has the same statistical shape as the whole.

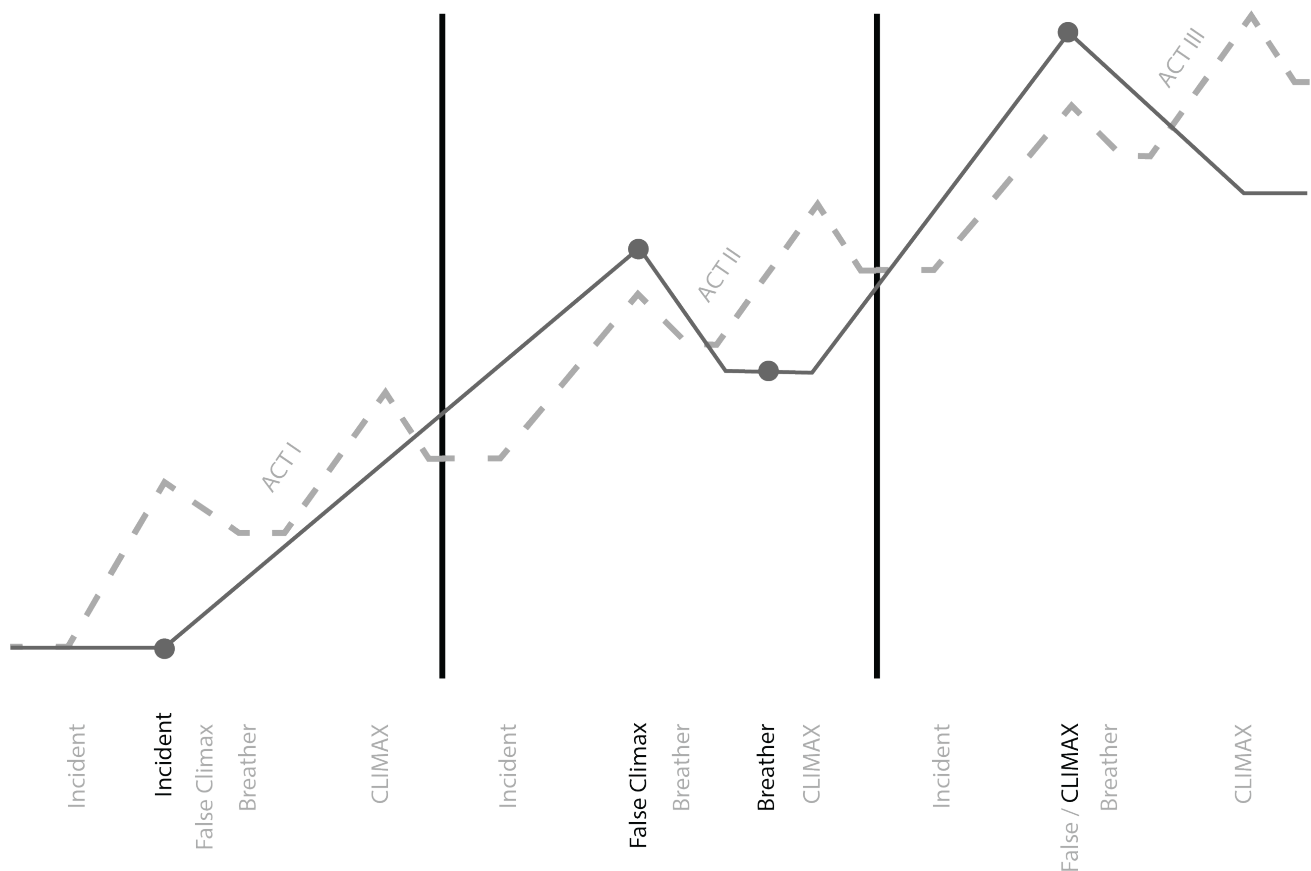
Fractals are useful for modeling structures where similar patterns recur at progressively smaller scales.



The hero has their first panic attack soon after. This is your breather. They develop their first strengths as a result, which leads straight into the True Climax of Act I.

Act I concludes with the protagonist falling into the New Ordinary of their new role... which becomes the starting point of Act II.

Repeat this fractal pattern for the other Acts.



Three-Act story with Two-Peak plot overlaid in a fractal pattern, once for the whole story, and again for each Act.

When repeated in this way, the dotted line reveals something interesting. True Climaxes for each act often occur during main story Breathers.

Why? Well, because the BIG plot line tracks major tangible events—explosions, battles, logistical stuff. Act-level plot follows character growth. Major character growth typically occurs during breathers, not when they kill a villain.

This also explains why the main plot's True

Climax is only the False Climax of the final act. When your hero gets the thing they've been chasing, is it really what they need? Not usually.

Staggering plot and character progression addresses the final problem common to most stories: A soulless epilogue.

If you save the final character climax like this, it hits when the character hits overall New Ordinary—making your story resolve on a super satisfying emotional sucker punch.

## PACING EVERYTHING

Finally, it's time to budget the number of chapters for your story.

Grab a pen and paper, and answer the questions on the right.

1) YOUR AVERAGE CHAPTER LENGTH: \_\_\_\_\_

2) YOUR BOOK TARGET WORD COUNT: \_\_\_\_\_

3) DIVIDE #2 BY #1 = \_\_\_\_\_

This is the correct # of chapters for your book

4) DIVIDE #3 IN THIRDS = \_\_\_\_\_

This is the correct # of chapters for each Act.

For example, here are the numbers for my next book.

I know NaNoWriMo is a 50K goal, but I want a 75K book in the end, so I'm budgeting based on final length—because I KNOW the chapters I write will be correctly paced. This project will take 6 weeks to complete.

1) YOUR AVERAGE CHAPTER LENGTH: 2,500

2) YOUR BOOK TARGET WORD COUNT: 75,000

3) DIVIDE #2 BY #1 = 30

This is the correct # of chapters for your book

4) DIVIDE #3 IN THIRDS = 10

This is the correct # of chapters for each Act.

Apply these numbers to the fractal plot chart and then draw lines. This will show you which events belong in each chapter.

Now you're ready to discovery write. In chapter 1, just set up your ordinary world. Contrary to popular advice, you can save

your minor inciting incident for the second chapter—but NO LATER, even if you're writing a 500,000 word epic.

Your main plot's inciting incident needs to happen in Chapter 4. Now you know.

You probably have ideas already. Now instead of barfing possible events in a notebook and organizing them later, you can put them straight into the chapter where they belong.

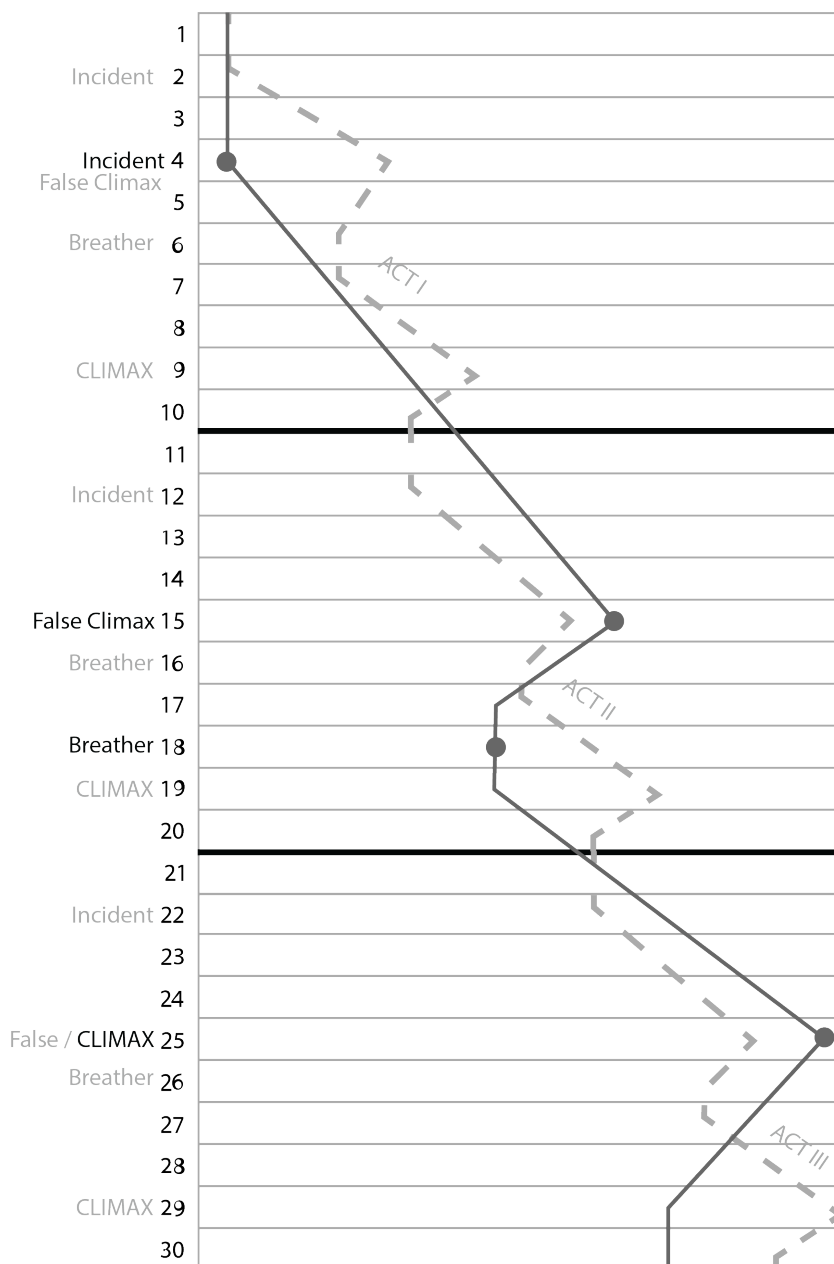
When I'm plotting, I draw straight on these charts.

If you want to pants like a maniac, you don't even have to fill out the chart. Just knowing what SHOULD happen in each chapter will be enough to keep you on track.

I've included blank, full-page versions of these charts on the next two pages. Feel free to print and draw on them.

Best of luck with your project!

- LAURA CRENSHAW





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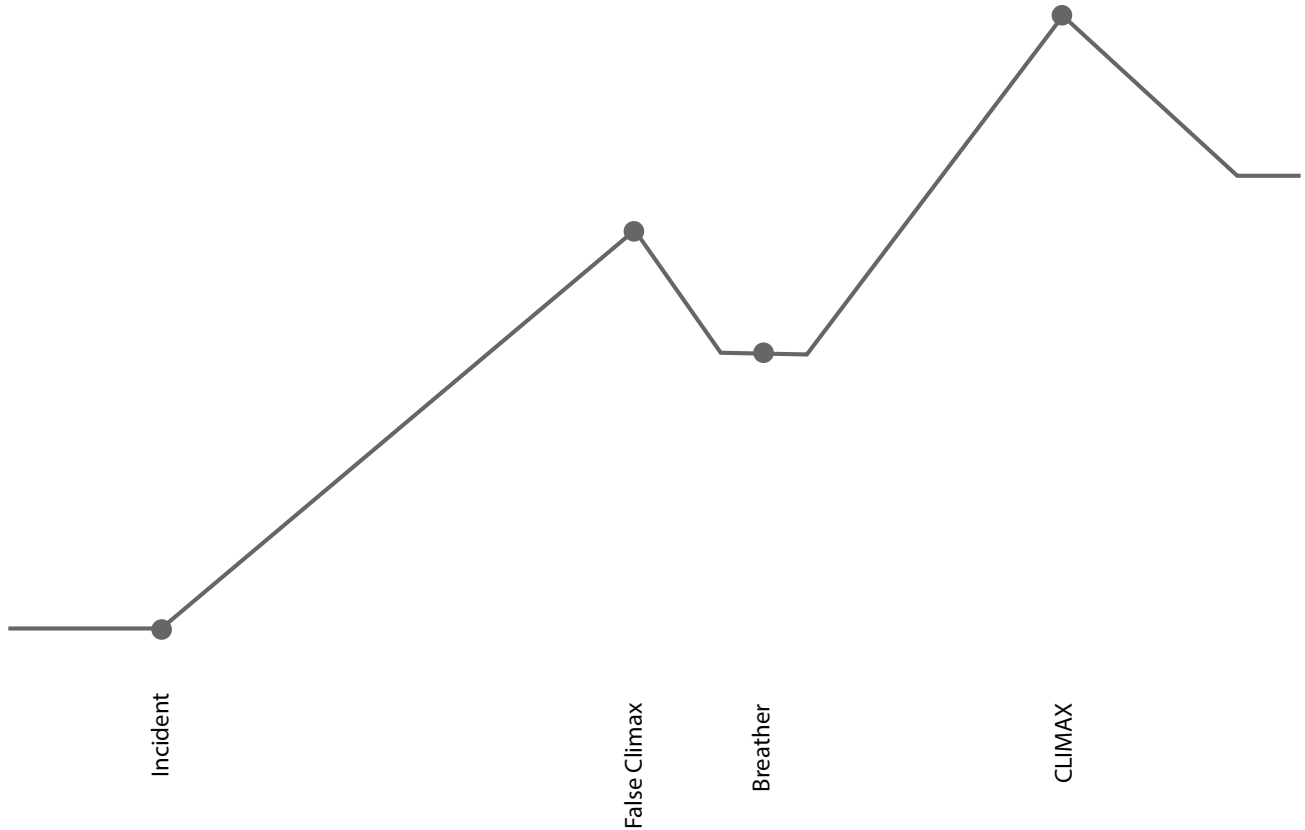


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# TWO-PEAK PLOT CHART

by Laura Crenshaw  
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NO MORE REMAKES

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