

Character Decision Making Flowchart

You can think of your entire novel as a decision tree. You throw problems at your main character and the way that character reacts, and the decisions she makes, take the story in a different direction, every time. If a character has agency, he should be able to react to a plot problem in multiple ways – and may have to run through the same problem more than once. (This is called a try-fail cycle, and there are usually at least three try-fail cycles a character must go through to solve the big challenges in her plot.)

When determining whether or not to introduce, specific problems into your plot, consider whether you can answer yes to at least two of these questions:

Is the problem relevant to the story’s theme?

Does the problem add to the story’s moral complexity?

Does the problem (or the character’s reaction to it) reveal something fundamental about the character?

Does the problem reveal something about/counterpoint the main conflict?

Does the problem move the story along (as opposed to causing it to meander, slowing the pace)?

If you choose to include the problem, consider:

Is the problem solvable in this scene?

If not, is it better introduced later in the story, closer to where it is to be addressed?

If not, will the story benefit from a slow burn, foreshadowing possible solutions to the problem?







