The Application Essay as Genre: Forms and Structures

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Genres and literary techniques

- Literary (poetry, drama, fiction, autobiography)
- Cinematic (slasher films, westerns, documentaries, the "date movie")
- Essays (compare/contrast, persuasive)

Application essays…

- are a form of persuasive autobiography
- have generic elements that can help you think about structure

"The devil is in the details"

"A writer can't hope to tell the whole of what 'happened' to his character. It follows then that a crucial matter in constructing the plot is the relevant selection of incidents to recount. Even if the writer were willing to start way back when (or even before) his character was born and go right through to (or even after) his death, he would still have to leave out ninety-nine one-hundredths, or more, of the events in his character's life. And what a dull story it would be anyway!" (86)

-- L. Rust Hills, *Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000)

The devil is in the details (cont'd)

"Martin spent a restless night and was at Miranda's door early the next morning."

- This is obviously a transitional passage, connecting an episode from the day before with an upcoming episode between Martin and Miranda at her apartment. The writer has chosen to summarize the time Martin spent alone in his apartment, restless and worried, rather than rend it in detail. (Hills 89)

- Imagine for a moment that Martin came in late, and, as we know he left early the next morning. Let's assume that he spent not more than four or five hours there in his apartment. And let's assume that restless as he was, he still managed to sleep for three hours. About the remaining hour or two that Martin spent alone and restless in his apartment there is much that could have been written. (Hills 89)
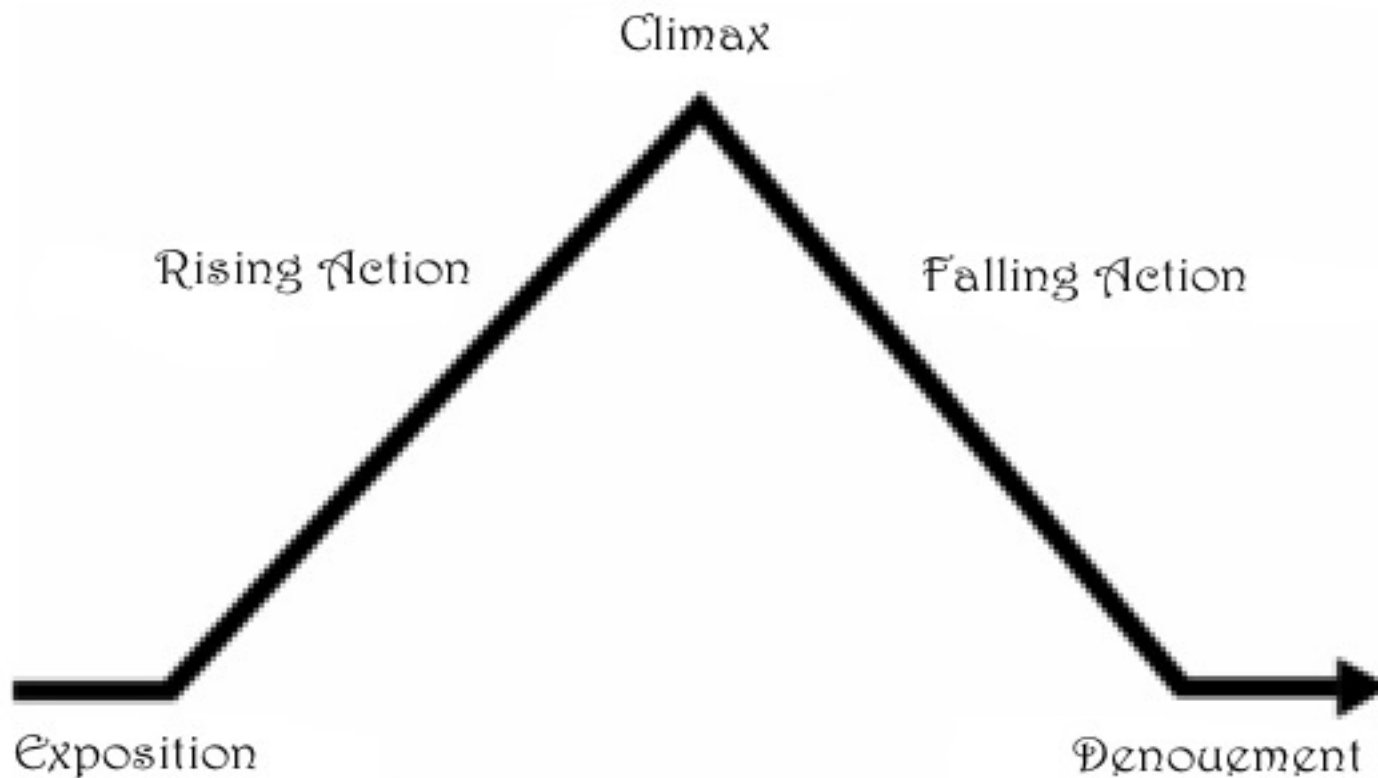
The devil is in the details (cont'd)

"Martin spent a restless night and was at Miranda's door early the next morning."

- An infinite number of details could be filled in here
- Whichever details you choose can speak volumes
- Use details to **show** rather than tell the reader

Narrative Arc

Freytag's Pyramid

Some Application Essay Subgenres

1. The narrative of development
2. The narrative of overcoming adversity
3. The defining moment or anecdote
4. The defining activity

- *Can be used in combination with one another*
- *Need to be made unique to you*

Structuring Devices/Techniques

- Long view / Short view
- Compression
- Foreshadowing
- Flashback
- The Bookend