

Types of Conflict

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<p>Some consider conflict one of the five elements of literature, when in actuality it is embedded in the plot. The central conflict is, however, significant and worthy of attention because it forms the basis for the essence of the literary work.</p> <p>There are four kinds of conflict divided into two categories: internal and external. Stories can contain more than one type of conflict simultaneously. For example, a character's internal struggles revolving around coping with a situation might lead him or her to engage in a precarious situation with nature (an external conflict).</p>	
Internal Conflict	External Conflict
<p>This is a situation when the protagonist is experiencing an internal struggle within him- or herself. The antagonist in this case is the self, which can often be a person's own worst enemy. Throughout the course of the work, the protagonist wrestles with internal strife, doubts, or identity issues, and readers experience his or her thinking and actions to overcome them. Sometimes the protagonist succeeds and reaches desired goals; other times, he or she is unsuccessful and succumbs to temptation. A character's internal struggles and the way in which he or she resolves them indicate inner strength or weakness. An example of this type of conflict is Edgar Allan Poe's (1843/2002) short story "The Tell-Tale Heart."</p>	<p>There are three forms of external conflict, although some divide it into even more finite categories.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Protagonist versus another: This is a fairly typical scenario in which the protagonist is in opposition to an antagonist—a human, an animal, a character, or even technology or a supernatural being. The protagonist must prevail over the antics and efforts of the antagonist, who attempts to prevent or thwart him or her from reaching a goal. 2. Protagonist versus nature: In this situation, the protagonist is faced with a challenge of overcoming some force of nature, such as a tornado, a mountain, or the wilderness. This type of story—for example, "To Build a Fire" by Jack London (1908)—can be one of survival in which the protagonist may or may not triumph in the end. These narratives can reveal human insignificance against powerful, indomitable, universal phenomena or show a character's strength or sheer willingness to live amid such forces. 3. Protagonist versus society or a group: A protagonist confronts and challenges the norms, customs, or values of a collective society or group that are in opposition to his or her beliefs or ideals, such as those pertaining to bigotry, war, treatment of others, or an injustice of some kind. The society or group disagrees with the protagonist and might threaten or ridicule him or her so that he or she confronts it or takes action. The outcome can vary in that sometimes the antagonistic group eventually aligns with the protagonist's perspective, or the protagonist is unsuccessful in garnering its support to adopt his or her way of thinking or behaving. The story could end with the protagonist dying to protect his or her convictions or even succumbing to the opposition.