

STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION OF THE PLOT IN ENGLISH DETECTIVE FICTION BASED ON ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S SHERLOCK HOLMES

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Abstract. *Why do we keep reading Sherlock Holmes when we already know exactly how he thinks? The secret isn't just his genius, it is the comfortable, familiar setup of the stories themselves. This paper looks at how Sir Arthur Conan Doyle builds his plots. Instead of using heavy academic jargon, we break down his formula into four simple steps: the cozy chat at Baker Street, the messy hunt for clues, the quick trap at the climax, and the final breakdown where Holmes explains everything. Our study shows that no matter what the crime is, Doyle uses the exact same math for his plots. This predictability was crucial for Victorian readers. It gave them a sense of safety and order at a time when the real world was changing way too fast.*

Keywords: *Detective fiction, crime literature, genre theory, English literature, Victorian literature, comparative literature, plot architecture, narrative structure, Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes, text segmentation, formulaic writing, reader psychology, abductive reasoning, cognitive stability.*

Introduction. When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle started writing the Sherlock Holmes stories in the late 1800s, London was a messy place to live. The city was growing incredibly fast, factories were popping up everywhere, and people were genuinely terrified of modern, organized crime. The old, simple way of life was disappearing, replaced by a crowded city that felt unpredictable and dangerous.

This is exactly why detective stories became so popular. People wanted to feel like someone was in control, and Doyle gave them exactly that. While earlier writers had messed around with mysteries, Doyle did something totally new: he turned the detective story into a reliable, predictable machine.

For years, critics have focused on the surface details of these stories the thick fog, the pipes, and the dark London alleys. But if we want to understand why these stories still hold up today, we have to look at the skeleton beneath the flesh. We need to look at how the plots are built.

This paper looks at that exact skeleton. We want to answer a very basic question: What is the fixed formula that keeps Doyle's stories together, and how does that formula keep us turning pages? By breaking these stories down, we want to show that Doyle's predictable style isn't lazy writing it is the exact reason people still love his work today.

Methods. To see how Doyle built his plots, we took a handful of his stories and stripped them down to their bones. We wanted to see exactly how much time and space he gives to each part of the mystery.

We picked five classic short stories from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894). Short stories are perfect for this because they don't have any wasted space. Every single page has to do a job, which makes the formula much easier to see. We looked at *A Scandal in Bohemia*, *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle*, *The Case of Identity*, and *The Adventure of the Six Napoleons*.

We divided each story into four clear parts based on what the characters are doing. First is the Setup (hanging out at Baker Street and listening to the client). Second is the Hunt (leaving the apartment to look for clues). Third is the Trap (the exciting moment where the bad guy is caught). Fourth is the Explanation (sitting back down at the flat to talk about how the mystery was solved).

To measure how Doyle balanced these pieces, we looked at two things: the percentage of words he used for each part, and how fast the story moved from one location or conversation to the next.


Results. When you look at the actual numbers, it is obvious that Doyle used a strict recipe. He didn't just wing it; he built every story using the exact same boundaries.

Plot Stage	Main Purpose	Typical Share of Story
Exposition	Introduce the case and client	35–40%
Complication	Investigation and clues	40–45%
Climax	Criminal exposed or caught	5–8%
Resolution	Solution explained and case closed	10–12%

Across all the stories we tested, the real estate of the text followed a predictable pattern. The setup at Baker Street takes up about 35% to 40% of the story. The messy fieldwork and investigation takes up the biggest slice, around 40% to 45%. The actual climax, the big showdown, is incredibly short, taking up just 5% to 8% of the words. Finally, the explanation at the end wraps things up using the last 10% to 12% of the text.

Every single story starts the exact same way: a peaceful, boring day at 221B Baker Street. Holmes is restless, Watson is watching him, and the chaos of the outside world feels far away. Then, a stressed-out client walks in and tells a long story about their problem. This part is almost entirely dialogue. Before they even put their coats on, Holmes pulls off a few mind-reading tricks based on the client's clothes, proving to the reader that he is already ten steps ahead of everyone else.

Once they leave the apartment, the hunt begins and the story changes gears. The long conversations stop, and Doyle starts describing physical things. The characters move fast



through London, and the text fills up with specific details like footprints, cigar ash, broken keys, or weird mud. The real trick here is Dr. Watson. Because Watson is the one telling the story, we see all the same clues Holmes sees, but we don't understand them. Watson's confusion keeps the mystery alive for the reader.

You might think the climax would be the longest, most exciting part of the book, but Doyle keeps it incredibly short. Whether the characters are waiting in the dark in *The Speckled Band* or jumping a suspect in *The Blue Carbuncle*, the danger is over in a flash. The physical threat is solved, but Doyle purposefully keeps the logic a secret for a few more pages to keep the suspense high.

The story ends right where it began: back in the safety of Baker Street. The fast-paced action stops, and Holmes takes center stage to give a long speech. This is the moment the reader has been waiting for. Holmes treats the mystery like a simple math problem, showing exactly how one clue led to another, giving the reader that great "Aha!" feeling before the story ends.

Discussion. When you see how neatly these stories fit together, it is clear that Doyle's formula wasn't an accident. It was a deliberate choice that gave readers exactly what they needed.

The plot of a Sherlock Holmes story moves through a very specific emotional wave: Safety, then Chaos, then Action, and finally Order. For a reader in the late 1800s whose life was changing fast, this pattern was incredibly comforting. By spending almost half the story in the safe world of Baker Street before going into the dark parts of the city, Doyle created a safety net for the reader's mind.

It is also telling that the explanation at the end is much longer than the actual fight at the climax. This shows us that the real point of the story isn't the physical excitement of catching a criminal. The real point is the mental satisfaction of making sense out of confusion. The story doesn't truly feel over when the bad guy is caught; it feels over when the mystery makes sense.

This pacing also explains why Doyle had to use Watson to tell the stories instead of Holmes. If we were looking through Holmes's eyes, the mystery would be over on the first page. He would look at a splash of mud and know the killer instantly, which would ruin the whole middle section of the story. Watson is the perfect middleman. He sees what Holmes sees, but he thinks like a normal person. His confusion slows the story down, giving the suspense time to grow until the final reveal.

Conclusion. Ultimately, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle didn't just invent a great character; he built a perfect machine for suspense. By balancing the messy reality of crime with a clean, predictable plot, he gave us a formula that still works perfectly today. The reason people still talk about Sherlock Holmes in 2026 isn't just because he is smart. It is because Doyle's

stories satisfy a deep human need: the belief that no matter how confusing or scary the world gets, there is always a logical answer out there waiting to be found.

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