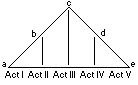
***<http://web.archive.org/web/19990427041601/www.hamlet.edmonton.ab.ca/CLIMAX.HTM>***

***Conflict:* to be in opposition with someone, or something else.**

Although it is understandable to think that the climax of the play occurs in Act V, Scene ii,- where all the main characters are killed,- the main conflict is resolved in Act III, Scene iii, when Hamlet is convinced that Claudius was responsible for the murder of Hamlet's father.

Because Hamlet's main goal is to avenge his father's death, the climax occurs when this conflict is resolved. Although the fight with Laertes is significant, this scene only resolves the conflict that occured when Hamlet killed Polonius.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of conflicts | | | |
|  | **man versus man** | **man versus nature** | **man versus self** |
| **examples from *Hamlet*** | Hamlet dueling with Laertes in Act V, Scene ii | Ophelia struggling against the water when she drowns | Hamlet wrestling with his conscious in his "To be, or not to be..." speach, in Act III, Scene i |
|  | Hamlet wrestling in Ophelia's grave, with Laertes |  | Claudius being unable to pray and not clearing his conscious of his past crimes |



**a.** exposition **|** **b.** rising action **|** **c.** climax **|** **d.** falling action **|** **e.** catastophe

Shakespeare's *Five Act Structure*

**A structural breakdown of Hamlet**

***Exposition:***  
**I,i:** The setting, characters and mood of the play are introduced.

**I,i:** Armed ghost appears to Horatio and guards  
**I, ii:** Introduced to the main characters (Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, Laertes, Polonius). **I, ii:**Hamlet reveals his depression (in his first soliliquy) and we discover he is upset over his mother's over-hasty marriage to Claudius.  
**I, iii:** Laertes and Polonius give advice to Ophelia regarding her relationship with Hamlet. They convince her to stop seeing him.  
**I, iv:** The ghost appears to Hamlet, after Horatio has informed him of the appearance of the ghost and Hamlet has gone to see the ghost for himself.

***The Main Conflict:***  
**I, v:** The ghost informs Hamlet that Hamlet must avenge his father's murder.  
Hamlet must figure out a way to avenge his father without getting killed, or arrested.

***Rising Action***  
Hamlet tries to discover the truth behind his father's death.  
The characters are developed further.

**III, i:** Polonius concludes Hamlet's madness is caused by his love for Ophelia.  
**II, ii:** Claudius has Rosencrantz and Guildenstern spy on Hamlet.  
**II, i - onwards:** Hamlet pretends he is "crazy" and full of madness.  
**III, i:** Hamlet attacks Ophelia and claims he never loved her, and tells her to get to a nunnery.  
**III, i:** Claudius concludes from Hamlet's actions towards Ophelia that "love" is not the cause of Hamlet's strange behaviour.  
**III, ii:** Hamlet meets with the players and devises a plan to "catch the conscious of the King."  
**III, ii:** The play *The Mousetrap* is performed.

***Climax***  
The Mousetrap helps to prove Claudius' guilt in the murder.  
Hamlet forgoes killing Claudius.

***Falling Action***  
Claudius takes charge of the action and plots Hamlet's downfall.

**III, iv:** Hamlet meets with Gertrude and mistakenly kills Polonius.  
**IV, i:** Gertrude informs Claudius of Polonius' murder.  
**IV, iii:** Polonius plans to send Hamlet to England and have him killed.  
**IV, v:** Ophelia is driven mad by her father's death and Hamlet's behaviour towards her.  
**IV, v:** Laertes returns from France to avenge his father's death.  
**IV, vi:** Hamlet returns to Denmark.  
**IV, vii:** Claudius and Laertes plan to kill Hamlet during a fencing duel.  
**IV, vii:** Ophelia dies. *It is uncertain whether her death was accidental, or suicide.*  
**V, i:** Hamlet and Horatio come across the funeral procession and Hamlet fights with Laertes in Ophelia's grave.  
**V, i:** Laertes challenges Hamlet to a duel to avenge his father's honour.

***Catastrophe***  
**V, ii:** The main characters are killed.

Claudius poisons the wine and Gertrude mistakenly drinks it.  
Laertes stabs Hamlet with the poisoned sword.  
The swords are exchanged and Hamlet stabs Laertes with the poisoned sword.  
Gertrude dies and informs the court that the wine was poisoned.  
Laertes tells Hamlet that he is poisoned, and that it was Claudius' plan.  
Hamlet stabs Claudius with the poisoned sword and forces the poisoned wine down Claudius' throat.  
Hamlet dies.

Horatio is left to inform the court of the deeds and misdeeds that has befallen.