**7 Types of Narrative Conflict**

by Mark Nichol

Every work of literature, and much nonfiction narrative, is based on at least one of the following conflicts. When you write a story or a biography, or relate a true event or series of events, you need not focus on such themes, and there’s no reason to state them explicitly (except in passing, perhaps, to provide insight about a biographical subject), but you’re wise to identify the conflicts inherent in your composition and apply them as you write.

**1. Person vs. Fate/God**  
This category could be considered part of conflict with self or with society (many people count only four types of conflict, including those two and conflict with another person or with nature). That’s a valid argument, as one confronts fate as part of an internal struggle and religion is a construct of society, but explicitly naming fate (*Oedipus Rex*) or God — or the gods (*The Odyssey*) — as the antagonist is a useful distinction.

**2. Person vs. Self**  
A person’s struggle with his or her own prejudices or doubts or character flaws constitutes this type of conflict (*Hamlet*).

**3. Person vs. Person**  
Any story featuring a hero and a villain or villains (*The Count of Monte Cristo*) represents this type of conflict, though the villain(s) is/are often representative of another antagonist in this list, whether a villain is in essence an alter ego of the protagonist (thus representing the conflict of person versus self) or stands in for society.

**4. Person vs. Society**  
When the protagonist’s conflict extends to confronting institutions, traditions, or laws of his or her culture, he or she struggles to overcome them, either triumphing over a corrupt society (I draw a blank here), rejecting it (*Fahrenheit 451*), or succumbing to it (*1984*).

**5. Person vs. Nature**  
In this conflict, the protagonist is pitted against nature (*Robinson Crusoe*) or a representation of it, often in the form of an animal (*Moby Dick*).

**6. Person vs. Supernatural**  
Superficially, conflict with the supernatural may seem equivalent to conflict with fate or God, or representative of a struggle with an evocation of self (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) or nature (*The Birds*). But this category stands on its own feet as well.

**7. Person vs. Technology**  
Humanity’s innate skepticism about the wonders of technology has resulted in many stories in which antagonists use technology to gain power or in which technology takes over or becomes a malign influence on society (*Brave New World*).