

Scriptwriting for Games
Game Plot Concept Terminology

Unity of Action:

The term used to describe an author's ability to relate each of the events of the plot to each other in some cohesive way. The simplest way to preserve unity of action is to constrain the events to an easy to understand linear model. Once that has been completed, you can change the story to use an advanced plot structure such as branching or parallel paths.

Example of Poor Unity of Action:

The son of a racecar driver loses a foot in a driving accident
The son decides he is going to be a racecar driver anyway.
The son discovers he has a real talent for playing the piano (extraneous event)
The son wins a disco contest (extraneous event)
The son discovers people are not very sensitive to people with disabilities
The dad discovers he has a daughter he never met (*extraneous event*)

Foreshadowing:

The term used to describe an author's use of vague or subtle hints about future events in a plot. Foreshadowing may also include early information provided about a character that proves to be essential to resolving the conflict.

The term red herring refers to an event that breaks unity of action as a means of misdirecting the audience. In the example above, this line can be considered a red herring:

The son discovers he has a real talent for playing the piano¹

Example: Early in the narrative an Alcatraz Prisoner fondly reminisces about sailing as a child. At the end of the narrative, these sailing skills help him to escape the island.

Unity of Rule:

This is a term I use to describe the cohesiveness of a game's actions and results. Unity of rule means that the author has employed some consistent set of actions and reactions that are perceived by the player. Unity of rule improves game play by eliminating random character abilities, environment attributes or game circumstances.

If you play a game and wonder, why didn't this happen before, unity of rule is probably not preserved.

Good Unity of Rule: The game encourages a player to run from enemies until they have acquired an adequate level of ability. The player cannot defeat their enemies until they reach a certain level.

Poor Unity of Rule: The game is a modern police drama that requires strategic thought to problem solve a murder. While playing the game the water cooler attacks the player.

¹ This is a red herring because it may lead the audience to think that the protagonist is going to abandon racecar driving for piano playing.