Every Shakespearean tragedy is divided into five acts and contains the following elements:

1. Exposition - the mood and conditions existing at the beginning of the play. Identifies the time and place and main characters are introduced.

2. Exciting force - also called the "complication" or "inciting incident," the exciting force is what "gets things going." The exciting force begins the conflict that will continue in the play.

3. Rising Action - series of events which lead up to the climax of the play. These events provide a progressive intensity of interest.

4. Climax - the turning point of the play. From this point on, the Shakespearean hero moves to his inevitable end.

5. Falling action - this includes those events occurring from the time of the climax to the end. The episodes will show both advances and declines in the various forces acting upon the hero.

6. The catastrophe - the necessary consequences of the hero's previous actions. Characteristically simple and brief.
Hamlet Dramatic Structure 1-3

Exposition
- Ghost appears in armor
- Polonius' advice to Laertes
- Hamlet's first soliloquy

Act I
- Ghost tells Hamlet to avenge his father's murder

Act II
- King directs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet
- Polonius decides Hamlet's madness is due to his love for Ophelia
- Hamlet meets with the players
- The Mouse-trap" is performed

Act III
- Hamlet fails to kill king thinking he is praying

Climax
- Hamlet tells Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery."