

THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE
ART & CRAFT OF SCREENWRITING
McKEE & VOGLER SYNOPSES

*There is a form to story, but not a formula. There are no rules to follow.
But there are principles to know.*

ROBERT McKEE's

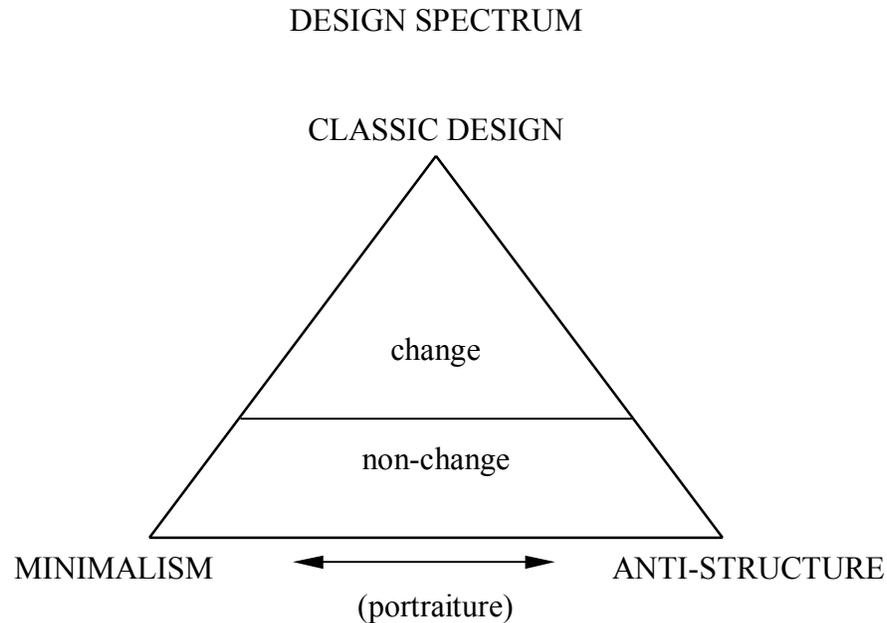
STORY STRUCTURE

class notes recorded by
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June 7-9, 1996

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CLASSIC DESIGN is the meat and potatoes of the Hollywood picture. They have closed endings – questions are answered and there is emotional resolution. There is an emphasis on external conflict. There is usually a single protagonist. The protagonist is active. The story progresses in continuous time. Events are triggered by causality – the chain reactions of life. We feel the interconnectivity of things. There is a consistent reality and the world of the story has rules. Classic Design mirrors the human mind.

MINIMALISM has open endings. The emotions are incomplete. There are pictures like *Paris, Texas* or *Radio Days*. There is an emphasis on inner conflict. There are often multi-protagonists. The protagonists are passive (relatively passive but not inert – the action is focused on the inner life).

ANTI-STRUCTURE are deconstructive pictures like *After Hours*, *Stranger in Paradise*, *The Meaning of Life*, or *Wayne's World*. The story progresses in broken time. Events are often triggered by coincidence and randomness. There is an inconsistent reality and the world of the story is absurd.

Minimalism and Anti-structure are made in reference to Classic Design.

Movies can be placed anywhere in the spectrum. The Fabulous Baker Boys would be midway along the Classic Design/Minimalism segment. Barton Fink would be in the middle of the triangle.

Audience shrinks as we move down the triangle. Accordingly, budgets shrink as well.

There is only one rule in Hollywood: Make Money!!!

ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS OF STRUCTURE

Story Structure means: **Story** → many possibilities **Structure** → choices at the banquet

Structure is a series of events that have been selected (included or excluded) from the vast array of life to convey emotions.

The hierarchal construction of a movie is:

Beat → Scene → Sequence → Act → Story

A **BEAT** is a change in human behavior.

A **SCENE** is an action in continuous time and space that turns a character's values of positive and negative.

Every scene ideally would be an event. Events mean change. (A screenplay is made up of 40-60 events.)

A meaningful event in a character is achieved through conflict.

A **SEQUENCE** is a series of scenes. They bring out a more profound change than any scene. They are comprised of scenes, which together have an objective of human change.

Sequences don't have to be continuous – you could be cutting away to other action in other subplot, but isolated and taken together they serve a unified purpose. (Billy needs a car; Billy gets a screwdriver; Billy's friend distracts the police; Billy hot-wires a car. You could name this the BILLY GETS A CAR sequence.)

ACTS are series of sequences that have a great level of change.

A **STORY** is a series of acts. They have absolute, irreversible change. The story's ARC is the great sweep of its change.

PLOT Don't think of this word as a device as in Agatha Christie. Think of the word as meaning "compose." Or map of action.

Multi-plot stories like *Parenthood* and *Pulp Fiction* use thematic unity – all the plots make the same argument. And they don't use subplots.

SETTING The story is located in time and has duration in time. The story is located in place. The setting will contain the cast. The setting sharply defines what is possible in that world. This limitation is a blessing. It helps you create a real world.

The setting must be so defined that the writer becomes the God of that world. That's why it will help to have the world be small. The smaller the world, the greater the knowledge, the greater the choices.

RESEARCH To become the God of the world, you must do research. Research creates choices.

The cure for writer's block is research. The writer must have something to say. Go to the library; learn what you're talking about. Keep copious notes on everything: snippets of dialogue, images, etc.

Imagination is another way to use experience. Inventory yourself. Know thyself; it all comes from your heart.

GENRE Story types from a definitive list. Like setting, genre sharply defines the world of the story because of the genre's conventions. One must work within, or in reference to, the conventions of the genre. These conventions also inspire choices, in the way that the rhyme scheme of a poem will inspire choices – (*I never would have thought of that idea if I hadn't had to conform to finding a rhyme to "bring."*)

Writers usually write about one thing over and over. Your love of the idea will die. Or the idea itself will die. You'll be sick of your movie. So ask yourself. What genre do I love? What am I passionate about? What would I want to watch over and over?

The "Education" genre is one in which the protagonist changes his view of the world or his place in it. (All characters do this, but in this genre it's the emphasis.) e.g. *The Accidental Tourist* or *The Fabulous Baker Boys*. The Disillusionment plot is the opposite, e.g. *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*.

The **PREMISE** comes to the writer as a hypothetical. "What would happen if...?" It starts the story – it's the spark.

The **CONTROLLING IDEA** is the statement made about what it takes for the protagonist to get to the goal. Every film is expressible in one sentence stating **VALUE + MEANS**.

The **CONTROLLING IDEA = VALUE + MEANS**

Story **VALUES** are the blood of storytelling. Values are binaries such as love/hate, alive/dead, courage/cowardice, legal/illegal, honor/humiliation, selfishness/generosity. They are those qualities of human experience with a + or – charge.

Value Ask, What is the primary value at stake in the film?

Means Ask, What is the means by which the value comes to theme?

For example, in *Kramer vs. Kramer*, the Controlling Idea is LOVE + SACRIFICE. Dustin's lawyer tells him he might be able to win custody on appeal, but it will mean the child will need to testify and will need to state publicly that he chooses his father over his mother which will permanently scar the child. Dustin refuses to do that and is willing to sacrifice having custody of his son. Meryl comes to take him but realizes that the son would be happier with Dustin and sacrifices herself for the son.

The basic crime story can be stated as Crime Doesn't Pay. And we see that idea out – they get caught. No one ever says crime doesn't pay (hopefully). But we know it because we've seen it happen – it's dramatized.

The Controlling Idea of *Dirty Harry* is not just Crime Doesn't Pay. It's Justice Prevails because the protagonist is more violent than the criminals.

If your story ends on a positive, the smart writer will go out of her way to show the negative. Don't slant only to your side. Respect the audience – they're smarter than you are. They feel everything; they see everything. They see more than you – you're blinded by knowing too much and being too attached.

Embrace creative limitations. If you try to pack your story with too many ideas, the story will implode. Have a Controlling Idea that informs every scene.

There are three types of writers:

Idealistic – portrays the world as we wish it. (*Love triumphs. Goodness triumphs.*)

Pessimistic – portrays the world as they darkly perceive it. (*Hatred destroys people when we use it. Evil triumphs because it's human nature.*)

Ironic – combines the idealistic and the pessimistic. (*Life is both good and bad. Love is an exquisite suffering.*) This is often the most satisfying. The audience will say, Ah, life is just like that.

A good idea or concept is not enough.

STRUCTURE

The structure is the way an idea is acted out. It convinces the audience of the idea.

Structure is a design to hook and hold the audience, chiefly by appealing to their curiosity – their forward-looking mind. (*How will this turn out?*)

The audience wants its expectations reversed. They come with a prayer: “*Please God, let me see something I haven't seen before. And let it be good.*”

They want the story to have the feel and rhythm of life – alternating between tension and relaxation.

CHARACTER

Aristotle decided that structure is more important than character. But structure and Deep Character are the same thing. The structure reveals the deep character.

The character is a metaphor for a human being – a work of art. They are nobler than human beings. They are clearer. This is why we know characters better than we know people.

Characterization is the sum total of all traits that make the person unique.

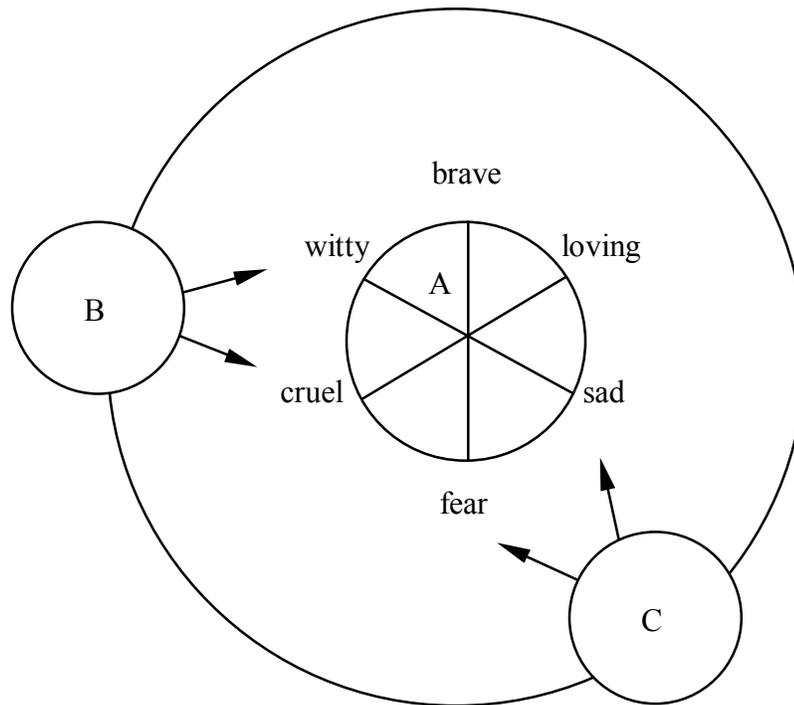
Deep Character: The true human nature, what a person really IS, is known only by witnessing them take action and make choices under pressure.

WHAT DO THEY WANT (consciously or unconsciously)? Their motivation – why they want to do it – is secondary. To try to understand WHY robs them of their mystery. This is an American obsession – a PCness – to know Why. It's more interesting to leave it to the audience. It's boring to reduce character to psychological profiles. Give some notion of Why they do it, but leave them be. Respect the audience.

A three-dimensional character does not just have a plethora of *traits* hurled at him. Dimension means contradiction and contrast within Deep Character, or between Deep Character and Characterization. (007 is a lounge lizard who becomes a thinking man's Rambo.) There is counterpoint of reality vs. perception.

A protagonist creates the other characters, to bring out his own qualities...

A Model of a Possible Character



In this model we have Character A in the center. He has the dimensions of brave/fear, witty/sad, loving/cruel. Does he posture as brave but reveal himself truly to be a coward? Does he generally act loving until things get tough when he becomes cruel?

Revolving around his is a solar system of other characters that he has created – his identity dictates that these characters must exist. Character B exists to bring out his wit and cruelty. Character C exists to bring out his fear and sadness. Those characters in turn interact with each other, and have bit players circling around them to bring out their qualities.

One-dimensional characters means one primary contradiction. But flat doesn't mean dull. They should merely have a depth that is appropriate to their purpose. If you give a character too much dimension, we'll expect them to come back in the movie. If they don't, we're pissed off or confused. So should the cab driver who simply takes the protagonist from the airport to the hotel be a born-again, suicidal, Touretter?

Imagine the ideal casting as you write your characters. Leave room for the actors – don't overwrite them. Less is more – if you can cut it, cut it. Don't write, *"Do you want to have this cup of coffee, darling?"* when *"Coffee?"* does the same thing.

Write all your characters loving them. They are people. Even the bad guys. You created them so love them. Oliver North, not a mustache-twirling villain; a villain is just getting by with what life has dealt him.

The root of all great characters writing is self-knowledge. We know only ourselves (maybe). So create characters from your heart.

Every character will always do the human thing.

Every human being is unique.

How can anything human be trivial?

(side note: try to give characters, especially the protagonist, an entrance into the movie.)

PROTAGONIST

The protagonist is a role (position) in the story. It's the person who has the will, desire (conscious or unconscious), and the capacity to see the Quest through to its conclusion.

It's usually one person but can be more if they want the same thing. (There are multi-protagonist stories in which they all want something different. In *The Big Chill* they all want something different, but are coming from a unified place of asking, *What happened to our idealism?*)

The protagonist is a willful character. Once you see what they want, you see their will. (Blanche DuBois seeks escape from reality and pursues her insanity willfully.)

The protagonist is a person with a desire that is at least conscious. They know what they want. But they often have an unconscious desire as well that contradicts the conscious desire.

They have a capacity to pursue the desire to the end of the line, beyond which the audience cannot imagine another. They have a chance at the goal – the audience must feel the chance.

The protagonist must be empathetic, but not necessarily sympathetic. That's optional. The audience sees a certain shared humanity – they now want the character to get his goal, and in doing so they feel like they are getting their goal.

The protagonist is the emotional door into the story.

There are two keys into the story:

- 1) Get them in. The audience must feel empathy with the protagonist. We root for ourselves.
- 2) Keep them in. there must be authenticity – an internally consistent and plausible world that allows willing suspension of disbelief.

The protagonist will take the minimal conservative action to get what they want from their POV. (This is what all humans do.)

One of the most common pitfalls is creating passive protagonists. There are reactive people who wander about having episodic experiences. This doesn't mean there needs to be a lot of exposition. Look at *Tender Mercies* or *The Accidental Tourist*.

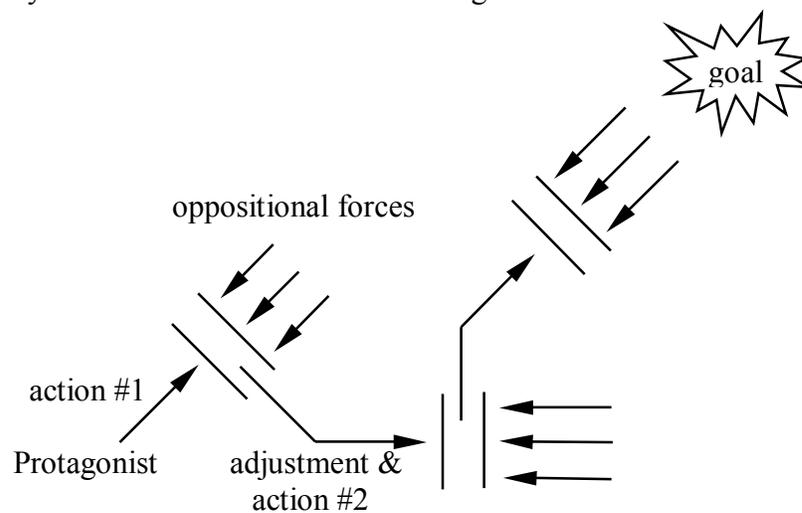
THE STUFF OF STORY

Storytelling is non-intellectual, it's emotional! Always choose feeling over logic – it has the **feel right!**

When someone comes out of a movie and says it was “interesting,” they're saying, “I felt nothing.”

WRITING FROM THE INSIDE, OUT

The protagonist takes the minimal step toward his goal and is met by unanticipated forces of opposition. A Gap opens between our beliefs of the world and the truth. But the protagonist, being willful, takes a more difficult action #2, which puts him at more risk. He's met by more opposition forces. The Gap widens. Action #3 has more risk, and so on, and so on, down the line to the final action, beyond which the audience can't imagine.



THE STUFF OF WRITING is the **GAP** that opens when the world reacts in unexpected ways – the difference between what we expect and what really happens. This is where the story lives – in the GAP. The audience wants to reach the goal. So when the GAP between expectation and results appears, the audience follows along and there's a burst of energy.

In every scene, something changes – a character or the world. That's what **TURN** means.

Writing is how you turn the story.

A good turning point will do all of these:

Surprise	Makes the audience ask, Why?
Rush of Insight	Can make the audience go back to the beginning scanning for buried truth. In <i>Star Wars</i> , Darth Vader reveals to Luke that he's his father. After we gasp, we go back not only through the whole movie looking for clues, but we go back the preceding movie. In <i>Kramer vs. Kramer</i> , when Dustin can't make French toast, we realize how spoiled he is and we go back to the beginning and feel she was justified to leave him.
New Direction	Keeps the moving picture moving.

After you ask, What would he do and what would he expect, ask the opposite. He knocks on the door. He expects the door to open. What's the opposite of the door opening? We try to crack open our expectation. Always try to see things from all sides. Only then can you write well.

When expectation match results, it's boring.

No cheap surprises like the hand that creeps into frame to strangle the protagonist but ends up tapping them on the shoulder because, oh look, it's a friend.

Aristotle ranked these this way:

Story
Character
Dialogue
Idea
Music
Spectacle

Of spectacle, he wrote, "It just cost money!"

CLASSIC FIVE PART NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

1. Inciting Incident

is the dynamic event, which upsets the balance in the protagonist's life. The protagonist has a need to put life back into balance.

The Inciting Incident can be two events that combine: The shark eats the girl and the sheriff finds the body.

The Inciting Incident of the main plot must be on the screen. (Subplot Inciting Incidents don't have to be.)

After the protagonist's life is out of balance, they must recognize it soon and react (choosing to not act as also a reaction).

The Inciting Incident puts into the protagonist's mind the desire to put life back into balance and then go to pursue it. It can be a conscious or unconscious. In *Carnal Knowledge*, Nicholson says he's looking for the perfect woman, but in fact he wants to humiliate women.

The Inciting Incident usually happens as soon as possible after the audience knows and feels as much as they need to. It usually happens in the first 25% of the movie. In *Jaws*, it's the very first thing. If it comes later, we should try to start subplots.

The Inciting Incident can also be a decision the protagonist makes, a decision that others make, or an accident (*Jaws*).

Creating the Inciting Incident, ask: What is the worst thing that could happen to the protagonist? How can that end up being the best possible thing? Or vice versa.

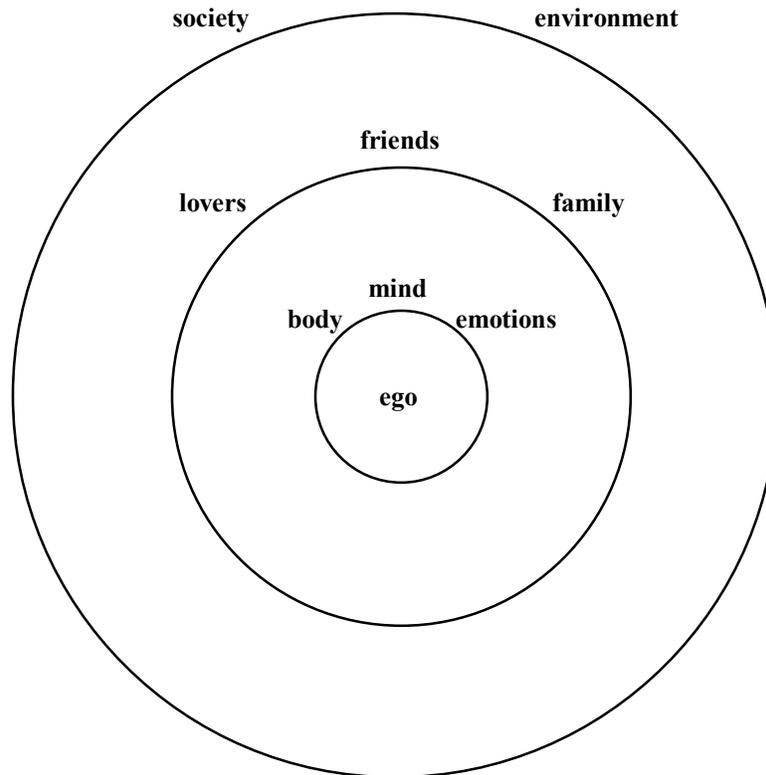
Because of the Inciting Incident, the Climax had to happen!

2. Progressive Complications

Nothing moves forward in a story but a conflict. As long as there is conflict on the screen, the audience is hooked and time vanishes.

The protagonist zigzags his way toward the goal with each Progressive Complication involving more risk. Each failed attempt of the protagonist is a point of no return, which makes them try a riskier step, another point of no return. If you have them go back and just recycle the first act, the movie isn't moving and, 50 minutes into the film, the audience is bored.

There are three levels to people's worlds: intra-personal, inter-personal, extra-personal.



Accordingly, there are three levels of conflict.

When conflicts happen on one of these levels... On the Intra-personal level – that is the domain of novels. On the Inter-personal level – that is the domain of theater and soap operas.

On the Extra-personal level – that is the domain best handled by film, and particularly action/adventure and farces. But it will mean that there will need to be many locations and a large cast to conflict with.

The best conflict in film happens on all three levels of conflict simultaneously. Think of the French toast making scene in *Kramer vs. Kramer*: Dustin's inner conflict is his pride that drives him to make the toast even though he has no idea how to do it. His inter-personal conflict is with his son – their new relationship is on the line here. He has to prove to his son that he's got everything under control and that the boy won't starve under Dad's new single parenthood. The societal conflict suggests that Dustin is a product of the times – a spoiled man, workaholic, who has always been used to women doing things for him.

Keep the cast down; keep the set count down. Create simple complexity by having the cast in conflict on all three levels – not just a massive cast engaging in an onslaught of shallow conflict.

A mid-act climax in Act 2 also helps with a long Act 2. (Really, this makes it four acts.)

Scenes	Sequences	Acts
minor reversal	moderate reversal	major reversal

A major reversal every 15 minutes can be repetitious. The constant changing becomes the norm. Thus six or seven acts is a hard thing to pull off. *Terminator 2* is a notable exception.

The audience feels emotion during the turning points – when the guy becomes rich, we’re happy. But once that’s happened we forget it. OK, he’s rich now – now what?

3. The Crisis Decision

The Crisis, also called the **Obligatory Scene**, is a true dilemma, like choosing the lesser of two evils. This choice gets them what they want or not, but there’s no tomorrow. Here we have the best glimpses of the protagonist. And the value will be most clearly seen.

In the Crisis, the protagonist comes face to face with all the forces of antagonism. (The sheriff faces Jaws.) The audience has expected this ever since the question was posed and it must be shown to them.

This is the moment of greatest tension and it should be played slowly. Draw out the tension.

It will be supremely wonderful to be able to crack open the Gap one more time here. This will make your movie *great*.

4. The Climatic Action

Faced with the Crisis, the protagonist chooses and takes the Climatic Action. It doesn’t need to be big explosions. But the meaning of an action needs to create emotion.

Because of the Inciting Incident, the Climax had to happen!

Crack open the Gap. The protagonist, confronted with what he never expected, improvises an action, which makes the audience have a rush of insight and go back through the whole film in a rush.

The writer has been whispering to the audience the whole time: “*Expect a happy ending.*” So they deserve it. Give the audience what they want, but not as they expect it.

It’s also a blessing to arrange for the Climax to be the payoff of as many subplots as possible, at least the most important ones.

Try to present the Climax visually. Truffaut said, “*Climax = Spectacle + Truth.*”

- Dead Poets Society* The students stand on their desks in tribute to their teacher.
- Greed* In the desert, the dying man handcuffs himself to his murderer.
- Electric Horseman* Redford releases his beloved horse into the woods.

The creation of the Climax is 75% of the creativity.

The Crisis Decision and the Climax Action often come back to back. Luke Skywalker feels that he won't be able to blow up the Death Star. Obi Wan speaks to him: "*Feel the force, Luke.*" He turns off his computer guidance system. Other pilots yell: "*Luke, what are you doing?*" Luke feels the force and uses his intuition to fire the missile manually. Bam! A decision – an action.

You can put the Climax wherever you want but the earlier it is, the more you'll risk repetitiousness.

5. Resolution

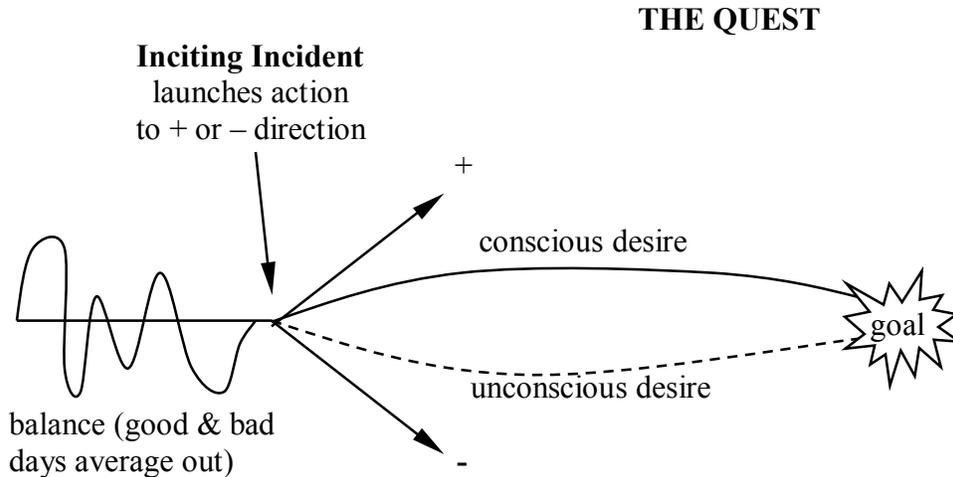
Show the grand spread of how people's lives were affected. Try to bring everyone together to show it.

Tie up loose subplots. Although, if you've waited until here to do that, it will be awkward and anticlimactic.

The resolution allows for a breath. It allows for the emotional impact to settle in, instead of just slamming the credits in the audience's face. It is the filmic equivalent of the theater's "slow curtain."

ELEMENTS OF CRAFT

The Spine is the primary unifying element – the desire of the protagonist to restore balance, whether conscious or unconscious.



All movies are a Quest. Name the Quest for the protagonist. Ask, “*What does he want?*” (consciously or unconsciously)

Scene Construction

A fact is neutral until a writer gives it meaning.

Ask these questions of each scene:

What value is a t stake and does it have a + or – charge?

At the end of a scene, is there a + or – charge?

If + stayed +, or – stayed –, should this scene really be in the script? It’s a non-event and just provides information. Lose the scene or change it so that it becomes an event.

Conceptualize a scene in 10 different ways then pick the one that feels right. Then you have a chance of having your story progress well and of having something original there.

NEVER TRUST THE FIRST IDEA – that’s where the clichés wait.

Analyzing the Scene

Ask, Who drives the scene? What do they want? They want to _____.

What is the source of antagonism? What do they want? They want to _____.

These should be direct opposites, in direct conflict.

Determine what are the values at the beginning of a scene?

Break the scene in beats. What are they doing? He is _____ ing.

⇕
use gerunds that convey the
real feeling, not cerebral words.

What reaction did the action get? She is _____ ing.

At the turning point of the scene, draw a line through it.

What are the values at the end of a scene? The same? Uh-oh.

An example. The scene in *Casablanca* when Laszlo and Ilsa are called into Renault's office for an interview with him and Major Strasser:

RENAULT
Did you have a good night?

He is mocking.

LASZLO
I slept -- Very well.

He is bluffing.

RENAULT
That's strange. No one is supposed
to sleep well in Casablanca.

He is calling the bluff.

A few moments later when Renault is indicating that he won't grant an exit visa...

LASZLO
Well, perhaps I shall like it in
Casablanca.

Threatening.

STRASSER
And Mademoiselle?

Counter-threatening.

ILSA
You need not be concerned with me.

Reassuring Laszlo.

LASZLO
Is that all you wish to tell us?

STRASSER
Do not be in such a hurry.
(MORE)

STRASSER (CONT'D)

You have all the time in the world.
You may be in Casablanca indefinitely...
Or you may leave for Lisbon tomorrow.
On one condition.

Slamming the door.

LASZLO

And that is?

STRASSER

You know the leader of the Underground
Movement in Prague, in Paris, in
Amsterdam, in Brussels, in Oslo, in
Belgrade, in Athens.

LASZLO

Even in Berlin.

STRASSER

Yes, even in Berlin. If you will furnish me
with the names and their exact whereabouts
-- you will have your visa in the morning.

*Propositioning a whore.
He wants his soul.*

A few moments later, after Laszlo derides the proposition, they receive news of Ugarte, from whom they had hoped to get the letters of transit.

RENAULT

I believe you have a message for [Ugarte].

LASZLO

Nothing important, but may I speak to him
now?

STRASSER

You would find the conversation a trifle
one-sided. Señor Ugarte is dead.

Twisting the knife.

TURNING POINT

ILSA

Oh.

RENAULT

I am making up the papers now -- We haven't decided yet whether he committed suicide or died trying to escape.

Twisting the knife more.

LASZLO

You are quite finished with us?

Retreating.

STRASSER

For the time being.

LASZLO

Good day.

At this point the value of FREEDOM is in a considerably more negative position.

Originality

Be the God of the world. Be inside the characters. If you don't get inside the character's head, you don't get emotions; you get emotional clichés. Don't guess; get inside! If I were him, what would I do?

Don't forget to know these things to be the God of your world:

Economics	How do the people make a living? What does money mean to them?
Politics	What are the power arrangements of the world (within a family; at work)? All human relationships are political.
Rituals	How do people take meals? Arrange toiletries? Drive?
Morals	What are the people's standards of good and evil, right and wrong?
Laws	What is legal and illegal in the world?
Values	What's important to these people?

Also, remember to consider:

Genre	What are the conventions of the genre?
Back Story	Know the previous significant events that will affect your characters in the story.

Design Cast Create a network of contradictory characters that can bring out different behavior from those they relate to. No two characters should react the same way to the same event. Polarize them.

There are The Three A's of originality:

Author The writer is the originator of the story. All else are interpreters.

Authority Instills a sense in the audience that the author really knows this world.

Authenticity Creates a very real and consistent world to allow a willing suspension of disbelief. Think about how in *Alien*, when they first wake up the first thing they talk about is shares, overtime, etc. These people are teamsters – that's what teamsters talk about. All around the ship are little chatchkas and pictures of family – that's the way teamsters decorate their trucks.

Originality does not necessarily mean eccentricity.

The camera is an X-ray machine of falseness. Of there's false dialogue, false sets, etc., we see it immediately.

There are two types of bad scripts that appear again and again:

The Personal Story. *What life is*. A slice of life. The person meanders about wanting a promotion and then getting a promotion; falling in love and then getting married. This kind of story is often under-structured and mistakes verisimilitude for real life.

The Commercial Success Story (written to be a commercial success). *What life could be*. It's imaginative or abstract. The story of a regular guy who saves the world. This type of movie tries to over-stimulate.

Negation of the Negation

To take the conflict as far as it can go, take it to the Negation of the Negation. We start with the original value of the story, which we'll call the POSITIVE, and then take it to the CONTRARY – ½ way in opposition to the Positive. Then we take it to the CONTRADICTION – the opposite of the Positive. For dynamic conflict we then go to the NEGATION OF THE NEGATION, where the Positive vanishes. Two negatives don't equal a Positive. We transcend the Positive question and go beyond it. The opposition had doubled back on the protagonist and taken it to a new and unexpected direction.

The story might be inherently weak if it doesn't go all the way to the Negation of the Negation. Very often, the forces of antagonism can align in your script like this:

Act 1 = Contrary Act 2 = Contradictory Act 3 = Negation of the Negation

In *Missing*, the positive is Justice. In Act 1, Jack Lemmon encounters the contrary – there is unfairness. He runs into red tape. In Act 2, he encounters the contradictory – injustice. In Act 3, he encounters the Negation of the Negation – in tyranny there's no injustice, there's no justice. It's beyond justice. Might makes right.

In *Casablanca*, Rick starts out at the Negation of the Negation – he is damaged from his loss of love. A former freedom fighter, he is turned upside-down and is now a cynical self-loathing drunkard, caring for nothing and no one. Casablanca, the world around him, mirrors Rick – it is a world of tyranny also turned upside-down where the rich grovel before criminals for help escaping Casablanca. The romance state is achieved in Act 2, and in Act 3 Rick arcs around back to the positive of selfless love.

Examples:

POSITIVE	CONTRARY	CONTRADICTION	NEGATION OF THE NEGATION
justice	unfairness	injustice	tyranny, beyond justice
love	indifference	hate	self-hate, hate masquerading as love
truth	white lies	lies	self-deception
consciousness	unconsciousness	death	the damned, loses soul
communication	alienation	isolation	insanity
faith in God	agnosticism	atheism	Satanism
intelligence	ignorance	stupidity	stupidity masquerading as intelligence
freedom	restriction	slavery	slavery perceived as freedom (1984) self-enslavement
courage	fear	cowardice	cowardice acting like courage
natural sex (condoned)	prostitution adultery pre-marital sex masturbation	rape incest pornography child molestation	necrophilia bestiality

If your story isn't strong, discover the values at stake in your movie and see how far it goes toward Negation of the Negation.

Storytelling is not about the middle ground – it's about the limits.

Subplots

Because Act 2 is usually long, subplots can be used to keep it moving. Subplots generally have their own three-act structure.

Here are four uses of subplots:

Contradiction of Main Plot	The subplot makes a different argument than the main plot to create irony.
Resonate the Main Plot	Variations on the theme to amplify the main plot's argument.
Setup the Main Plot	This subplot is used to setup the main plot – e.g. the Mrs. Mulray incident at the beginning of <i>Chinatown</i> . Or the Adrian subplot love story in <i>Rocky</i> .
Complicate the Main Plot	The main plot of <i>Foul Play</i> is the assassination attempt on the pope. Goldie Hawn's involvement is a subplot. Complicating the Main Plot is why there's often a love story in a crime movie.

If subplots don't have one of the above purposes, it can split the movie and create a feeling of thematic disunity.

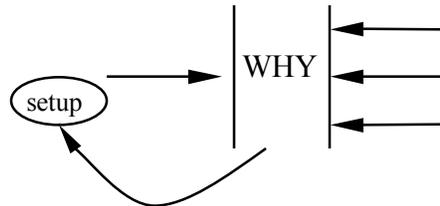
A Sample Three-Act Breakdown				
	Act I climax	Mid-act climax	Act II climax	Act III climax
1	30	60	95	117 120
sample subplot timing	A	A	A	
	B	B	B	
C	C	C		C

If the emotional charge at the movie's end is + then the reversal at the end of Act II should be –.
If the movie ends with an ironic combination of both, then you evaluate the predominant charge.

Movies are about their last 20 minutes. So most important are the last two changes – the end of acts II & III.

Setup and Payoff

Setups, when we first encounter them, should only have their own surface meaning – it is what it is. If you telegraph “SETUP,” the audience will know it and your payoff is ruined. For an alive story, the setup should be planted well (but not deep) so that the audience can find it when it retrospects and find the second meaning.



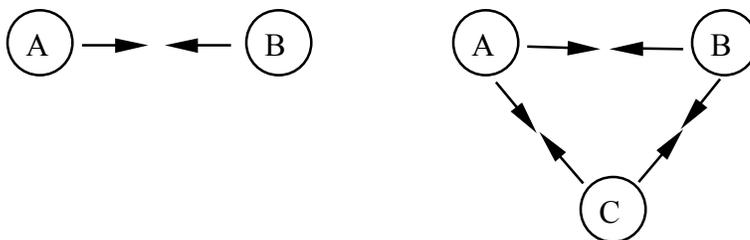
The audience is surprised when expectations don't match results. They ask, “*Why?*” They go back, digging for truth. They find the setup and “get it.” The Gap closes and it's the payoff. But that also becomes the next setup. When Vader tells Luke that he's his father, it's the payoff but also sets up an entire other movie.

So don't worry about the “logic” of a movie – you can make it work by doing back and fixing it – set it up.

Choice

Good/evil or right/wrong is no real choice. People always do what they think is right from their POV. The worst killer, when he kills believes that he's doing the right thing within his belief system.

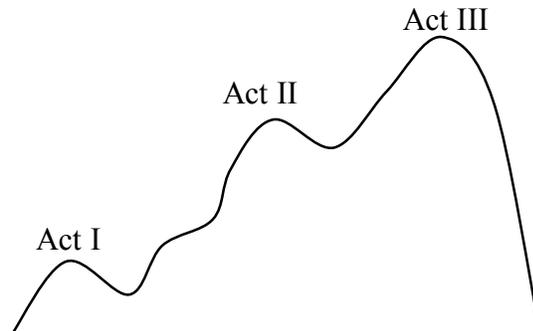
A simple two-element relationship cannot be told in a long form. It would become merely a “she loves me – she loves me not” story. So we add a third element so that there's choice and risk. This adds numerous permutations or relationship.



In *Casablanca*, there's the triangle of Rick (former freedom fighter and love-sick cynic), Ilsa (representing the love element), and Laszlo (representing The Cause). They pull on each other's qualities and create the conflict of love vs. duty. When Rick is forced to choose between love and duty (inner and outer) he chooses both, and in doing so finds true, selfless love in which he can let Ilsa go.

Composition

Pacing Shape the roller coaster



Create cycles of rising tension to gather energy – like sex.

Unity There must be unity but there also must be variety. You can't keep hitting the same note over and over. If it's a comedy, put in sadness, and vice versa.

Mood will not substitute for emotion. Mood is used to create a context for emotion and give specificity.

Rhythm and Tempo

Rhythm Scripts have 40-60 scenes (events). That means that it averages out to 2.5 pages per scene. Of course there's variation, but do you have many eight-page scenes?

Tempo The Energy within the scene.

As we approach a climactic scene, pick up the rhythm (shorter scenes) and tempo, because the climactic scenes, being important, are purposefully longer and slower to underscore them.

However, you must "Earn the Pause."

You can't repeat the same emotional effect back to back. If you juxtapose three same scenes, the first will be sad, the second will be less sad, the third starts to be funny.

Progressing the Story

Four ways to do it:

Widen the Story

The characters go into society. *Kramer vs. Kramer* starts with just the family but then widens to include neighbors, bosses, social workers, the court, etc.

Go Deeper	Beat the characters up emotionally, physically, psychologically. <i>Ordinary People</i> goes deep. <i>Chinatown</i> goes deep and wide.
Broaden Significance of Imagery	In the beginning the people represent themselves but end up as archetypes. They pick up symbolic charge, <i>the Deer Hunter on the Mountaintop</i> or <i>the Terminator in the Labyrinth</i> . Sarah Connors faces the Minotaur (Terminator) in the Labyrinth and goes from waitress to goddess.

The protagonist should be an underdog against the forces of antagonism.

The Center of Good

The audience surveys the value landscape, looking for and evaluating where they can find the center of good – good in relationship to what’s around it.

In *The Godfather*, the Corleone family demonstrates loyalty so they are the “good” guys in a violent, immoral setting. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, we feel for Clarice but also bond with Dr. Lecter – there’s evil and corruption all around him but he’s clever and calm and brilliant, and opposes the hateful bureaucrats.

The audience is willing to be in empathy with anyone as long as they can find the center of good. You have to light that candle.

Exposition

This is facts about the story, setting, and surface characterization.

Make it invisible. **SHOW, DON’T TELL!**

Convert your exposition to ammunition. Dramatize it.

Only give the minimal amount the audience needs to know.

Spread it out and save the best for last. “*You can’t kill me, Luke – I’m your father.*”

Scenes turn on either action or revelation. It’s a good technique to be able to bring in exposition on a revelation.

Flashbacks are another form of exposition. If you must flashback, go to mini-dramas, not static information providers.

Don’t flashback until there’s a need to know. And don’t volunteer exposition.

Narration Can you cut out all voiceover and have your story still work? If so, put it back in because you're probably using it for counterpoint (*Annie Hall*). If it doesn't work, change the story because the story doesn't work. Voiceover can destroy a movie.

There's also the device of the unreliable narrator. Narrators don't automatically know themselves – they're people, not God. Do we believe Alvie Singer in *Annie Hall*? The narrator in *The Usual Suspects* is the hidden villain and a liar.

Subtext

Text is the surface of the movie – what we see, hear... what they do. Subtext is the life underneath that.

Nothing is what it seems – the duality of life. There's always another level or two or three or four.

If the scene is about what the scene is about (On the Nose), you're in deep shit.

The rich stuff of acting is the subtext. Nicholson's greatness is that you can see his unconscious through his eyeballs.

At the movies, we are mind readers – we peer searching for the deeper truth because we know that nothing is what appears. We want to know the real thoughts and feelings. And it's there because the actors made it be there.

If you don't include any subtext, it's dead, dead, dead. And the actor will invent one out of your control.

For a scene of falling in love, instead of over a candlelight dinner, how about a certain glance while changing a tire.

It is impossible for humans to do and say what they're feeling. Otherwise, therapy would take two weeks. When, in *Chinatown*, Faye Dunaway finally reveals that the woman is “*my daughter and my sister*” she is really saying, “*Help me!*” Nicholson's character reads that as easily and nonchalantly as we always, even unconsciously, read the subtext of those around us. His next line is, “*Then we'll have to get you out of town.*”

All fine writing is the interplay of text and subtext at every moment.

Coincidence

Coincidence in itself is meaningless. But it is also a fact of life. If coincidence needs to be in your story, it should happen early so that we can find the meaning from it.

The Inciting Incident can be a coincidence, as in *Jaws*.

After the midpoint, stop using coincidence. And certainly none for the ending as in a *deus ex machina*. It erases meaning, and with meaning goes emotion.

Some anti-structure films can use coincidence throughout instead of causality, as in *After Hours*. The coincidence becomes the consistent thematic unity.

Comedy All the same principles apply, however...

The dramatist is interested in the inner life: the comedy writer in the social life.

Where the dramatist respects humanity, the comedy writer says that under the best of circumstance, humanity will screw up.

Comedy writers are angry idealists. They want a better world and their technique is to get us to laugh at the world and detach from our institutions and rituals. Note how comedies often have as their title the institution they are hoping to attack – *Parenthood*, *Airplane*, *Dr. Strangelove*.

With comedy, you can pause the narrative drive to stop for the laugh.

Comedy tolerates coincidence because it's a chaotic world. And it will sometimes tolerate *deus ex machina*, if the protagonist has suffered a lot but never lost hope. The audience says, "*Hell, give it to him.*"

The dramatic character is flexible enough to recognize their obsessions. The comic actor is not – they are blind to their obsession. Archie Bunker was blind to his bigotry. If he ever recognized it, the comedy would stop. Inspector Clouseau is obsessed with being the world's greatest detective, but is continual evidence to the contrary.

In comedy, the Gaps (turning points) cause belly laughs.

This sounds simple but it's true: The comedy is a **funny story**. When you pitch the story it will cause laughter (if it's pure comedy, that is – we usually mix them into dromedy or crimedey).

Comedy is pure – if they laugh, it works.

Mystery/Suspense/Dramatic Irony

Mystery You tease the audience by hiding the facts and/or giving red herrings. This only works in murder mysteries. There are Closed Mysteries – like Agatha Christie; and Open Mysteries – like *Colombo* – we see the crime and watch him sort through all the clues looking for the fatal flaw. Here we know less than the character. We don't empathize.

Suspense Interest is compelled through a combination of curiosity and concern. The audience has the same knowledge as the character but wonders how it'll turn out. Here there is empathy.

Dramatic Irony The audience knows more than the character. This creates dread and compassion (to know what will become of the character). We might, for example, want to protect him from a lurking danger we know about.

You can try to mix these three states, sometimes knowing less than the character, sometime more.

Melodrama

This is the result of under-motivation. It's good to write big scenes but lift the motivation to the level of the action so that it's real – like life.

Adaptation

The inner conflict is what the novel does best. The inter-personal conflict is what theater does best. The extra-personal, or societal, conflict is what film does best.

The purer the novel, the poorer the play, the worse the film. If it's in someone's head, how do you get it onto the screen?

Read the novel and find the essence. Break it down – what happens – to its step outline, event by event, one line per turn. Then put the novel away forever. (Chances are you'll find the story is weak. Or if it works, it's 400 pages and you can't take anything out or the story collapses.) You have to reinvent the novel. The film will be completely different but share the spirit.

20 options on screenplay will yield one movie. 50 books with film rights optioned will yield one movie.

Theater is 80/20 dialogue; film is 80/20 image.

The chase is pure cinema, pure visual expression. It is natural for the camera to want to do extra-personal conflicts.

Television

TV follows the same rules but must deal with commercials. The best way to hook the audience over a commercial is to end on an Act Climax. But it usually doesn't break that way, so we put in cliffhangers. There aren't acts; they're parts. In the **MOW**, it's divided into seven parts, but it maintains the three or four act structure.

Image Systems

Every image comes with a symbolic charge. Every object connotes, not just denotes. A car drives up: Is it a Mercedes – *wealth*? A Lamborghini – *vanity*? A TransAm – *sexual identity problems*?

Create an Image System – images that repeat subliminally to enrich the expressiveness of the film.

External Images – like spider webs, tear drops, crucifixes – are the stuff of student films.

Diabolique uses water images: mud puddles, murky swimming pool, bathtub... they eat fish for dinner. Water, the icon of hope, is turned into an image of corruption. But it's subliminal.

Slip the imagery in as it is slipped into your dreams. We use it the same way as we use the film's score – for subliminal effect.

Some Image Systems: *Alien* – technology and sex; *Aliens* – motherhood; *Big Chill* – materialism in the face of lost idealism; *Brazil* – ducts; *After Hours* – art as weapon.

A director must be expressive, not decorative. It's the writer's job to set up the Image System.

GETTING IT ON THE PAGE

Description

Be a Screen Writer. Put the movie in the reader's head. The sensation! Paint a picture of image and action.

Section description into smaller lines to help direct the attention of the readers, so the flow is as it would be in the movie.

You are describing the experience of the screen. It's always **NOW** and it's always **ACTION**. It's vivid.

To write vividly, avoid all adjectives and adverbs. Direct, active description. Name things with their names. Nouns are the names of objects; verbs are the names of action. It's not a *big nail*, it's a *spike*. Spike paints the picture. Not *He walks gingerly across the room*. But *He pads across the room*.

Eliminate IS and ARE from the script. *A mansion sits on a hill*, not, *A big house is on the hill*.

What do we see on the screen? We can't see the past. So don't describe the past. Can you write fairly, *He comes home from a tiring day at work?* or *He lumbers in and drops his briefcase*.

Eliminate WE SEE and WE HEAR.

No metaphors or similes in description. There are no as if's in a movie: He doesn't walk in *as if he owned the place*. He walks in, *notices a piece of torn wallpaper and tears it off*. Or, *he rearranges the chairs*.

Producers will be wary of flowery description.

There are two types of writing talent and they have no connection to each other:

Literary talent – uses beautiful language. (Literary talent can be your enemy.)

Story talent – can affect creative conversions of life to a higher form.

Dialogue

Dialogue should have compression and economy. Use short speeches because the audience's attention is on image – they're not listening very closely and they only hear it once.

Don't write dialogue when you can create something visual.

Write the screenplay. Then, add the dialogue.

Dialogue is the regretful second choice.

The more dialogue you write, the less effective it is.

Use simple sentences: noun → verb → object.

Short speeches – five lines or under.

If you think a speech had to be long, consider, there are no monologues in life. Break it up:
action → reaction → action → reaction.

There are no prepared speeches in life – it's all improvisation out there.

The Writing Process

Writing is not for sprinters; it's for the long distance.

The Step Outline

Have a piece of paper for each act and write on it one sentence per turn. The sentence describes simply what the event is. Then pitch this to a friend and watch their eyes.

The Treatment

Expand each one of the sentences from the Step Outline into several paragraphs, describing moment by moment what happens. Include subtext as part of the description, woven in seamlessly. Include the person's thoughts and feelings, but no dialogue.

This can end up being 200-250 pages (double spaced). It better be at least 60.

Decide now if the story works before...

The Script

Distill the treatment down, hiding the subtext, creating images, adding dialogue. This is how characters will have individual voices and not just sound like you – when you finally pull that off them, they will speak the best dialogue you’ve ever written, and with their own voice.

This is writing from the inside, out. It allows the most creativity and is the fastest.

Feedback

After you’ve finished a draft, have actor friends read it out loud, with someone reading every description. You are silent the whole night, listening with your belly. Tape-record the evening, and shut up. Then ask the actors for their opinion at the end of the evening and still shut up.

Never be defensive with people, trying to prove you’re right. Are you going to convince them your script is great? Don’t defend your script – Listen! 90% of what they say will be useless; they just have ideas. But you’re listening for where they keep pointing the finger. That’s a point, which doesn’t work, even though they may not get a handle on why or how. The more they talk, the more problems exist. When they say nothing, it works.

Stop clinging and don’t rewrite to save you six precious scenes and pretzel a story that savors them. Don’t be afraid to destroy your work. Kill your little darlings.

McKEE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. Thou shalt not take the crisis/climax out of the protagonist’s hands. The anti-deus ex machina commandment.
2. Thou shalt not make life easy for the protagonist. Nothing progresses in a story except through conflict.
3. Thou shalt not give exposition for exposition’s sake. Dramatize it. Convert exposition to ammunition.
4. Thou shalt not use false mystery or cheap surprise.
5. Thou shalt respect your audience. The anti-hack commandment.
6. Thou shalt know your would as God knows this one. The pro-research commandment.

7. Thou shalt not complicate when complexity is better. Don't multiply the complications on one level. Use all three: Intra-personal, Inter-personal, Extra-personal.
8. Thou shalt seek the end of the line, the negation of the negation, taking characters to the farthest reaches and depth of conflict imaginable within the story's own realm of probability.
9. Thou shalt not write on the nose. Put a subtext under every text.
10. Thou shalt rewrite.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. What event starts my story so the crisis and climax must occur?
2. What is the relationship between the inciting incident and the crisis/climax of the story?
3. Does the inciting incident and the way in which it occurs make the crisis/climax eventually necessary?
4. The inciting incident occurs and creates branching probability. Given this, do you feel the ending you've designed absolutely must occur?
5. What event starts the story so that the protagonist must go into action? Even if the action is saying, "*I'm not going into action,*" the protagonist must react to the inciting incident. Even if it is to deny action.
6. What does my protagonist want that comes out of this inciting incident? What drives the protagonist on? What goal must the protagonist accomplish?
7. What position does the character meet? What are the sources of antagonism? From what levels of reality? Always try to create three-dimensional stories in which conflict is coming from all three levels of reality.
8. Is the opposition equal to, if not greater than, the protagonist? The protagonist cannot be up against forces, which he can easily handle and overwhelm. Do these forces really test him/her as a human being? Do these forces become so powerful and cumulative in their power that they are severely testing the deepest human qualities in this person?
9. As we move toward the ending, do we become more deeply involved? Not staying the same, not losing interest, but more deeply involved.
10. Have we grown to identify with and/or like the protagonist?
11. As we near the ending, do we feel an exhilaration/acceleration of action and reaction?

12. Does the action in the crisis/climax fully express my root idea without the aid of dialogue?
13. Every movie is about one idea. How does each scene in the film bring out an aspect of that one idea, positively or negatively?
14. What is the worst possible thing that could happen to my character? How could that turn out to be the best possible thing? Or visa versa.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

BY

CHRISTOPHER VOGLE

STRUCTURE NOTES

Act I

1. Ordinary World
 - Hero is introduced in familiar environment.
 - Create contrast with strange new world to be entered.
2. Call to Adventure
 - Hero is presented with a problem, challenge or adventure to undertake.
 - Establish the stakes of the game.
 - Make clear the Hero's goals.
3. Refusal of the Call
 - Hero is reluctant to accept challenge.
 - Some outside influences – a change in circumstances, a further offense against the natural order of things, or the encouragement of a Mentor – is required to get Hero past the turning point of fear.
4. Meeting with the Mentor
 - Hero is encouraged, trained, inspired, by a spirit of wisdom and knowledge.
 - Prepares Hero to face the unknown challenges ahead.
 - Mentor must allow Hero to face the unknown world alone.
5. Cross the First Threshold
 - Hero commits to the adventure.
 - Takes the initial step out of the Ordinary World and into the New World.
 - Mark the turning point between Act One and Two

Act II

6. Tests. Allies. Enemies
 - Hero encounters various individuals and situations, which aid and hinder Hero's progression toward goal.
 - Learns the rules of the New World.
 - Allows for character development as Hero and or companions react under stress.
7. Approach the Inmost Cave
 - Hero comes to and enters antagonist's stronghold.
 - Seeks goal or reward established at the onset of adventure.
 - Often stops and prepares for this encounter.
8. Supreme Ordeal
 - Hero encounters the ultimate challenge to his arrival.
 - Confronts death or supreme danger.
 - Does battle with his greatest fear or enemy.
 - A "black moment" for the audience, not knowing whether the Hero will live or die.
9. Reward
 - Hero earns some form of boon or treasure through his extreme bravery or self-sacrifice.

- Reward can be a special weapon, spiritual token, healing elixir, knowledge, experience, greater understanding, love, or just a good story, etc.
- Reconciliation with member of the opposite sex – love interest.
- Earns title of "Hero" by taking supreme risk of behalf of community.

10. The Road Back

- Hero, persuaded by his defeated but outraged enemies, heads back toward the Ordinary World.
- Chase scenes often ensue.
- Marks turning point between Acts II and III.

Act III

11. Resurrection

- Hero is cleansed and reborn in one last life and death ordeal.
- Overcomes third challenge – last ditch effort of his enemies – and is transformed by his experiences.
- Able to return to the Ordinary World with renewed energy and insight.

12. Return with the Elixir

- Hero shares his treasure with other inhabitants of the Ordinary World.
- Journey is meaningless and doomed to be repeated unless Reward is brought back and used for the benefit of all.

** The Hero's Journey is a skeletal framework that should be fleshed out with the details and surprises of the individual story. The order of stages may vary, and all stages may be deleted, added to or drastically shuffled without losing their power.*

THE HERO'S JOURNEY OVERVIEW

ACT I	ORDINARY WORLD	
	CALL TO ADVENTURE	
	REFUSAL OF THE CALL	
	MENTOR	
	FIRST TRESHOLD	
ACT II	TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES	
	APPROACH THE INMOST CAVE	
	SUPREME ORDEAL	CRISIS
	REWARD (SEIZING THE SWORD)	
	THE ROAD BACK	
ACT III	RESURRECTION	CLIMAX
	RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR	

The Hero's Journey Worksheet

Act I

1. Ordinary World

Description:

Opening Image: Creates mood, suggest where the story will go, often metaphorical with respect to conflicts, themes, issues characters will face.

Hero's Entrance: What is the character doing? How does it reflect their attitude, background, strengths, problems, should define and reveal the character unless intent is to mislead the audience by concealing character's true nature.

The Hero's Lack: Hero is lacking something or something has been taken away from them; something may be missing from their personality, i.e. compassion, the ability to express love, etc.

Lacks:

Flaws:

Quirks:

Regrets:

Weaknesses:

Neuroses:

Goals & Wishes:

What single characteristic could lead to their destruction and downfall?

What single characteristic could save the Hero?

What is their inner problem?

What is their outer problem?

What is the universal human need?

What is at stake? Make the stakes high enough for audience to care, should increase with each act.

What does the Hero stand to gain or lose in the adventure?

What are the consequences if Hero succeeds?

What are the consequences if Hero fails?

Theme: Place to state the theme – what is the story really about in a single word or phrase? Love? Trust? Betrayal? Greed? It is the premise – the underlying statement or assumption about an aspect of life.

2. Call for Adventure i.e. message, messenger, new event-war, warrant, stirring within the Hero – message from the unconscious which appears in dream, fantasies, visions, could be last straw, synchronicity – string of accidents of occurrences; or lack of need – kidnapping, loss of health, love, etc., running out of options.

What is the call or series of calls to adventure?

What is the Hero's challenge, adventure, goal?

Think of calls to adventure in your own life – do any relate to your Hero? To create believability, draw on your own experience, or people you know who have had similar challenges and integrate them into your story.

3. Refusal of the Call

How does Hero refuse the call?

What is the Hero afraid of?

What change in circumstance gets Hero past the fear to pursue the adventure? (i.e. encouragement of a mentor, a further offense, etc.)

4. Mentor – character needs someone to talk to.

5. Crossing the First Threshold

External force:

Internal force:

Metaphorical Images to denote transition:
(i.e. door, gate, bridge, water, river, drastic visual contrast)

How does audience know you have gone from one world into another?

How does energy of the story feel different?

Act II

6. Tests, Allies, Enemies (Obstacles)
(Hero is tested – series of trials and challenges)

In what ways is your Hero tested?

How does your Hero deal with frustrations and challenges?

How does that show the gradual transformation of his/her character?

7. Approaching the Inmost Cave

What is the inmost cave for your Hero? Is there a physical inmost cave, i.e. headquarters of the villain or an emotional equivalent?

How does the conflict build and how do the obstacles become more difficult?

In what way is the Hero, in facing external challenges, also encountering inner challenges?

8. The Supreme Ordeal

What is the greatest challenge (fear) for the Hero?

What is the death and rebirth of your Hero? (death of their greatest fears, the end of a relationship, death of an aspect of their personality; birth – the change, the transformation)

Death:

Rebirth: How is your Hero changed and transformed?

What is the Supreme Ordeal in your story, this is the Crisis (not the Climax); the central event of the story, usually in the middle of Act II, (the Crisis moment which conveys the sense of death and rebirth)

Describe the moment the Hero faces their greatest fear:

9. Reward (Hero is recognized & rewarded for having survived death or the great ordeal, i.e. celebration, campfire scenes, love scenes, taking possession, self-realization)

The Hero experiences the consequences of having survived the supreme ordeal. What are your Hero's consequences?

What does the celebration look like?

The Hero takes possession of what he/she was seeking? What does your Hero take possession of after facing their greatest fears?

After surviving death, does your Hero have new powers? Better perception? New insight or understanding? Self-realization? Describe.

What does your Hero learn by experiencing death?

Does your Hero realize he/she has changed? Have they learned to deal with their inner flaws?

Act III

10. The Road Back (new locale; ultimate destination)

In psychological terms, this represents the resolve of the Hero to return to the ordinary world and implement the lessons learned in the special world. What are the lessons your Hero learned in the special world?

The road back marks a time when the Hero rededicates him/herself to the adventure. It is a turning point, another threshold crossing which marks the passage from Act II to Act III. It may cause a change in the aim of the story. It causes the third act. It can be another moment of crisis to set the Hero on the final road, i.e. retaliation or neuroses coming back in a last ditch effort before they are vanquished forever; chase scenes.

What in your story will set the hero on the road back forever?

Is there a chase scene? How do you envision it?

What is the road back in your story? Is it returning to your starting place? Setting a new destination? Adjusting to a new life in the special world?

11. The Resurrection (an additional moment of death & rebirth – the Climax, the last and most dangerous meeting with death; can also be a difficult choice, sexual climax, a highly emotional but decisive confrontation, a peak experience of higher consciousness, etc.)

What final ordeal of death and rebirth does your Hero go through?

What aspect of your Hero is resurrected?

A new self must be created in the Hero to return to the ordinary world. It should reflect the best parts of the old self and the lessons learned along the way. The new self is immune to temptations and addictions that trapped the old form. Describe your Hero's new self.

How are you going to make the change visible in the appearance, behavior, attitude, and actions of your character?

How does your Hero apply the wisdom and knowledge s/he has gained in the special world to the ordinary world?

How does your Hero been cleansed?

What are the lessons the Hero learned from the other characters and how has he/she incorporated that into their personality?

Resurrection calls for a sacrifice by the Hero. Something is surrendered, such as an old habit or belief, and something is given back to the Hero. Describe what your hero surrenders and gains?

Any visuals which come to mind and which you can use to metaphorically suggest the change?

Is there a showdown in your story – i.e. the biggest confrontation? Describe.

Do you have a climactic moment, which is a choice among options for the Hero, indicating whether or not the Hero has truly learned the lesson of change? A difficult choice tests a Hero's values: will he choose in accordance with his old, flawed ways, or will the choice reflect the new person he has become? Describe.

Is your Climax a quiet one – a gentle cresting of a wave of emotion? A quiet Climax can give a sense that all the conflicts have been harmoniously resolved, i.e. after a Hero has experienced the death of a loved one, there may be a quiet Climax of acceptance, a final realization.

If open-ended form what moral questions do you want to leave for the audience? Brainstorm idea of how you could do that? What new questions might you want to pose?

The functions of the return can be many and varied depending on your story. Some examples are: A good return unties the plot threads with a certain amount of surprise – there may be a twist to the ending; rewards and punishments are handed out to the various characters – i.e. villains are punished for their evil deeds; the elixir (could be of love); the world is changed; Heroes take on wider responsibility; tragic ending. Respond to any of the aforementioned with respect to your story.

Some pitfalls to avoid of the return:

- * Unresolved subplots – subplots should be acknowledged or resolved in the return.
- * Too many endings – keep it simple.
- * Abrupt ending.

NOTES FROM ACTIVE IMAGINATION

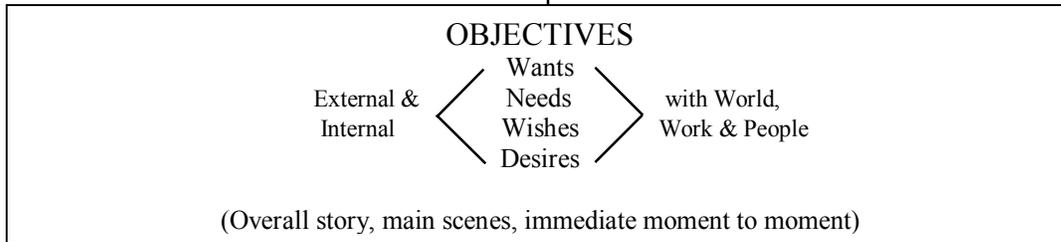
ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT OVERVIEW

Character 1 – Protagonist				Character 2 – Antagonist	
Objective	Obstacles	Action	Objective	Obstacles	Action

Analysis Of Conflict

Character 1 – Protagonist

Character 2 – Antagonist



Analysis Of Conflict

Character 1 – Protagonist

Character 2 – Antagonist

OBSTACLES

What is in the way?

What/Who is against me?

Price character pays to overcome obstacle?

How do character's needs become stronger in the face of the obstacle?

(Overall story, main scenes, immediate moment to moment)

Analysis Of Conflict

Character 1 – Protagonist

Character 2 – Antagonist

ACTIONS

What must the character do?

(Overall story, main scenes, immediate moment to moment)

- What is the dramatic climax of the scene?
- Where does the energy in the scene come from?
- What are the surprises? What do the characters expect to happen? What do we expect to happen?
- What do we want to happen? What is our rooting interest?
- What have we learned? What have our characters learned?
- Are there any moments of doubt? Do we doubt the outcome of the scene? Do the characters?
- What is each character's agenda? Why are they there and what do they want? Do they reach this goal or not? Do some characters need others to fail in order to reach their own goals?
- Does this scene thrust us into the next scene?

PAGE TO SCREEN

We'll read some scenes, then look at the filmed version. What was on the page, and what ended up on the screen?

The basic rule: Communicate as much with each scene as possible.

Show, don't tell.

Only the essentials go on the page.

Coming in at last possible moment, leave at the first possible moment.

OUTLINING SCENES

Questions to ask when you outline your scene:

- What will we learn? Who will we meet?
- Where will the scene start, and where will it end?
- Who is in the scene?
- Where will it take place?
- What is each person's agenda in the scene?

- What is each character's objective within the scene?
- What is each character's attitude within the scene?
- Where does my energy come from?

SITTING DOWN TO WRITE

Focus on the essential thing that you need to accomplish in this scene to move the plot forward. What do we need to learn and who do we need to meet?

Really bad first drafts are allowed and encouraged.

Some reminders:

- INCLUDE ONLY WHAT IS ESSENTIAL TO THE PLOT
- Nothing goes on the page that does not go on the screen. (But the converse is not true... much is on the screen that is not on the page.)
- Cut camera direction. Be stingy with dialogue directions. Don't act for the actor, don't direct for the director.
- Be clear. Do not take shortcuts at the cost of clarity.
- Omit needless words. Be concise.
- Write in complete sentences. Use correct grammar and orthodox spelling.
- Use definite, specific, concrete language. Avoid "seem."
- Write in a way that comes naturally.
- Establishing characters
 - Give everyone a name
 - Physical appearance
 - Movements and mannerisms
 - Behavior towards others
 - Speech (what they say and when they talk)
 - Attitude toward self
 - Attitude of others towards character
 - Attitude towards physical surroundings
 - Physical surroundings
 - Past

- Dialogue
 - Establish character
 - When to talk, when to say nothing – Using the power of silence
 - Making people sound like people
 - Making people sound different from each other
 - Words have power. Use them wisely

REWRITING

Writing is rewriting. Learn to go back again and again, improving, sharpening, and freshening your scenes.

Rewriting questions to ask:

- Is this word, line, or action essential?
- Am I getting the most out of each moment?
- Where is the energy coming from?
 - Do I use the energy to get out some dull information?
 - If my scene is dull, is it at least short?
- Does the scene push the reader into the following scenes?
- Does the scene serve multiple functions?
- Is my scene visual? If not, can the same information be communicated in a visual way?
- Will changing my setting and characters improve my scene?
- Is my scene too slow or too fast?
- Can my scene dovetail into the next scene with an image or theme?

WRITING SPECIAL SCENES

- Speeches
- Love Scenes
- Very Long Scenes
- Scenes with Stylized dialogue