

FUNDAMENTALS

How We Tell Stories

Any book you read or class you take on the subject of screenwriting will revolve around the notion of structure. People expect stories to be told to them in a certain format by virtue of a deeply embedded concept of narrative that spans all mediums and cultures.

Beginnings, middles, endings. Conflict, climax, resolution. Rising tension, goals, perils. From anecdotes to epics, you can expect any story to feature these kinds of elements. If you're tackling a script, here's our take on the key moments you should try to include - beat by beat.

ACT 1 ESTABLISHMENT

This is where the general theme, tone and setting of your story are introduced.
Think of it as opening the door into the world that your characters are going to inhabit.



ACT 1 SETUP & EXPOSITION

It's a good idea to introduce your protagonist and secondary characters as soon as you can. Cast some light on their personalities, goals, vices and virtues. Making it clear what your characters want is key to keeping your story interesting.

ACT 1 INCITING INCIDENT

Every compelling story is about some kind of journey - be it literal or figurative, internal or external. Your first inciting incident is what starts your protagonist down that path. Generally, we get the first glimpse of the antagonist (or villain) around this point.

ACT 1 CONTEMPLATION

Here, the protagonist usually takes some time to contemplate their circumstances and the gravity of the road ahead.

ACT 1 TURNING POINT

Finally! An event, force or decision puts the first act to bed and steers the story into conflict. This is where things start getting exciting (we hope).

ACT 2 ACCELERATION

Now the journey has really begun. Your story should start gaining momentum. Maybe there's a change in perspective? Maybe the tone intensifies? Make it clear to the audience that things are happening.

ACT 2 ENTER OBSTACLES

Some kind of obstacle has to get in the way. This is typically where the antagonist assumes agency against the protagonist.

ACT 2 DEAD CENTER

This is the approximate middle of the story. Here, the protagonist contemplates their resolve in the face of the obstacle and explores their new circumstances. This is usually where a “Prize”, or an expected endpoint of the journey becomes apparent.

ACT 2 CROSSING THE RUBICON

At this point your protagonist should make a decision to confront and overcome the obstacle and/or antagonist in their path. From here, there is no going back.

ACT 2 RAISING THE STAKES

Things should start getting difficult for your protagonist around here. There will be struggle, suffering, testing of resolve, and most importantly, something that puts the whole journey in jeopardy.

ACT 2 CRISIS

People lose interest in stories where things are too easy for the hero. This is the famous 'all is lost' moment, where it seems like everything is going to fall apart. This is also the end of the second act, where conflict and tension are nearing the breaking point.

ACT 3 PREPARATION FOR CONFRONTATION

Now your protagonist adjusts to the previous challenges, formulates a new plan, and goes on the offensive.

ACT 3 CINEMATIC CONFLICT

At last, direct confrontation between the protagonist and the antagonist (or antagonist forces). This is the big moment that your whole story has been building up to - will it end in victory or defeat?

ACT 3 AFTERMATH & RESOLUTION

The climax has passed, and we've arrived at the end of the journey. Now it's time to survey the fallout: have things turned out the way the antagonist expected? What has changed?

ACT 3 DISSOLUTION & FAREWELL

As your characters go on their way, contrast your initial theme, tone and setting with the end result.
