



FUNDAMENTALS

How We Tell Stories

Essential Beats to Work Into Your Story

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 **way** 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 are key moments you should try to include - beat by beat.

ACT 1 OPENING IMAGE

What opening visual can you use that will help establish the theme, tone and setting of your story?
Think of it as opening the door into the world that your characters are going to inhabit.



ACT 1 SETUP & EXPOSITION

Introduce your protagonist and secondary characters right away. 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 STATEMENT OF THEME

What is your film about? This is the opportunity to show the audience.

ACT 1 CATALYST/LOCKIN/CALL TO ACTION/TURNING POINT

This is the moment in which the main character either actively sets out to achieve her goals, or is forced to go down the path plotted for her. Think of the most extreme thing that can happen to your characters, make it happen, and go from there.

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. **TROUBLE** is in store.

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 MIDPOINT

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 MORE

Things should **BE INCREASINGLY** difficult for your protagonist by this point. 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 LOWPOINT

Just as the main character seems to be within reach of her goal, something happens that derails her progress or makes her question her journey. A sense of despair or confusion may set in.

ACT 3 CLIMAX

This is the big moment in which the action spikes and everything that you've set up before now comes to a head. In a traditional action film, the climax might be a big chase or fight scene. In short, the climax should show your main character just within reach of her goal.

ACT 3 RESOLUTION & AFTERMATH

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 DENOUEMENT & FAREWELL

As your characters go on their way, contrast your initial theme, tone and setting with the end result. For the final scene viewers will see, you should try to cap off the theme of the story, and leave your audience with a sense of how your protagonist has grown through the events of the film.
