**University of Gondar**

**College of Social Science and Humanities Department of Film and Television Production**

20

**Feature film writing**

**3rd year students**

**By Abreham dires**

**FEATURE FILM WRITING**

**WHAT IS A SCREENPLAY?**

CONTENT: Various industry professionals have offered opinions on what a feature screenplay is:

Alan Armer: “A blueprint for a movie.”

Syd Field: “A story told with pictures.”

Paul Schrader: “An invitation to collaborate on a work of art. They contain 3 things - theme, character, structure. That’s all.”

Louis Nowra: “Screenplays are simply a blueprint for a director. It’s not an art - It’s a collaborative process.”

Bob Towne: “A movie is just four or five moments between two people. The rest of it exists to give those moments their impact and resonance.”

William Goldman: “Screenplays are structure.”

Viki King: “A feature screenplay is a document you can create in 21 days.”

Linda Seger: “Five things: the story lines, the characters, the underlying idea, the images and the dialog.”

Linda Aronsen: “A screenplay is - a technical instruction manual for everyone involved in the process of creating the film.”

FORM: Either way, the form is universally agreed upon:

SCREENPLAY FORM: 105 to 120 A4 pages, in standard Screenplay format, in Courier 12-point font, 1-inch margins all round, and with black card front & back, 3-hole drilled, and bound with 2 `brads’ in the top & bottom holes.

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS**:

**From Premise to Screenplay**

The usual steps (and documents) involved in writing a feature screenplay:

**The Premise** (1-3 sentences) The Premise (sometimes called the Concept) is a simple statement of the main character/s, and their dilemma.

**The Synopsis** (3 paragraphs) The synopsis is about 3 paragraphs long, and reflects the beginning, middle and end of the story.

**The Outline** (1-3 pages) One or Three pages, describing the setup, development and resolution, and sketching the details of the characters.

**Character Notes** (1-3 pages for each major character) Outlines the different characters, and their Backstories.

**`Pitch’ Document** (10 pages) Contains all of the above documents.

**cene BreaSkdown** (2-3 pages) A `beat sheet’ or list of points, outlining the key event/s of each scene. Can also be done on approx 60 index cards (one for each scene).

**The Treatment** (20-40 pages) Twenty to forty pages, a short story virtually, which is simply an expanded version of the Outline, but with more character detail, and various dramatic `moments’ and key scenes fleshed out in more detail. Usually each scene is a paragraph. Contains no direct dialog, and is written in the third-person present tense.

Sample dialog (1 page for each major character) `Test scenes’ or monologues, so that each of your characters speaks in their own distinctive voice.

The Screenplay (120 pages) 105-120 A4 pages, in standard Screenplay format, in Courier 12-point font, and with black card front & back, 3 hole drilled & 2 brads in the top & bottom holes. Has scene headings, stage directions and dialog.

**WHERE TO START?**

Screenwriters can start anywhere, including:

• an idea, featuring a central character and a situation (a news story, song, dream, etc )

• a preferred genre – romantic comedy, action-adventure, sci-fi, crime thriller

• an image (the main character, or the antagonist, or the film’s climax)

• a theme (Mateship, There’s No Place Like Home, Family, Honour Among Thieves, Revenge)

• adaptation (novel, short story, biography, real-life event)

**theme**

The Theme is the MESSAGE of the film. In good scripts, it pervades most scenes.

Some example film themes:

• The futility of war Gallipoli, Full Metal Jacket, Apocalypse Now

• `There’s no place like home’ The Castle, Wizard of Oz

• Great love defies even death Moulin Rouge!, Titanic, Romeo & Juliet

• Tell the truth Breaker Morant, Tootsie, Witness

• Nothing is what it seems American Beauty, The Matrix, The Usual Suspects

• Loneliness Proof, Storm Boy, Taxi Driver

• Honour among thieves Chopper, Reservoir Dogs

love of country Teza

• Revenge Mad Max, Gladiator, Hamlet

**THE GREEK LEGACY: 3-ACT STORY STRUCTURE**

We have inherited the 3-act structural paradigm of drama from the Greeks.

In 321 B.C., Aristotle laid down the principles of dramatic structure which we still adhere to, in his book Poetics.

French New Wave filmmaker Godard said “All stories have a beginning, middle and end, but not necessarily in that order”

As an interesting side note, Shakespeare often used 5 acts in his plays.

Robert McKee in his book `Story’ talks about using 5 story beats, within 3 acts, in modern film stories.

William Goldman often uses 5 acts (Butch Cassidy & The Sundance Kid, All The President’ Men, Misery, The Right Stuff)

**THE PREMISE**

Premise in feature films generally follows this structure:

A certain type of person has a certain goal, and encounters obstacles that have changed him/her when finally they do (or do not) achieve that goal.

Namely, the structure is composed of:

1) The Exposition (or SETUP)

2) The Confrontation (or DEVELOPMENT)

and

3) The Resolution (or DENOUEMENT)

of the dramatic problem posed by the story...

Or more simply: in Act One you get a person up a tree, in Act Two you throw rocks at them, and in Act Three you get them down again.

The key philosophy behind a film Premise is:

Someone wants something very badly, and is having a lot of trouble getting it.

Write your film’s Premise here:

**The three acts**

**ACT I IS THE SET-UP**

One page of screenplay is approximately one minute of screen time.

**Act** I, the beginning, is a unit of dramatic action that is approximately twenty or thirty pages long and is held together with the dramatic context known as the Set- Up. Context is the space that holds something in place—in this case, the content.

In this unit of dramatic action, Act I, the screenwriter sets up the story, establishes character, launches the dramatic premise (what the story is about), illustrates the situation (the circumstances surrounding the action), and creates the relationships between the main character and the other characters who inhabit the landscape of his or her world.

As a writer you've only got about ten minutes to establish this, because the audience members can usually determine, either consciously or unconsciously, whether they do or don't like the movie by that time. The first ten-page unit of dramatic action is the most important part of the screenplay.

**ACT II IS CONFRONTATION**

Act II is a unit of dramatic action approximately sixty pages long, and goes from the end of Act I, anywhere from pages 20 to 30, to the end of Act II, approximately pages 85 to 90, and is held together with the dramatic context known as Confrontation.

During this second act the main character encounters obstacle after obstacle that keeps him/her from achieving his/her dramatic need, which is defined as what the character wants to win, gain, get, or achieve during the course of the screenplay. If you know your character's dramatic need, you can create obstacles to it and then your story becomes your character, overcoming obstacle after obstacle to achieve his/her dramatic need.

Act II is where your character has to deal with surviving the obstacles that you put in front of him or her.

What is it that drives him or her forward through the action?

What does your main character want?

What is his or her dramatic need?

All drama is conflict. Without conflict, you have no action; without action, you have no character; without character, you have no story; and without story, you have no screenplay.

**ACT III IS RESOLUTION**

Act III is a unit of dramatic action approximately twenty to thirty pages long and goes from the end of Act II, approximately pages 85 to 90, to the end of the screenplay. It is held together with the dramatic context known as Resolution. I think it's important to remember that resolution does not mean ending; resolution means solution.

Act III is that unit of action that resolves the story. It is not the ending; the ending is that specific scene or shot or sequence that ends the script. Beginning, middle, and end; Act I, Act II, Act III; Set-Up, Confrontation, Resolution—these parts make up the whole. It is the relationship between these parts that determines the whole. Plot Point • A Plot Point is defined as any incident, episode, or event that hooks into the action and spins it around in another direction.

• Plot Point I occurs at the end of Act I, anywhere from pages 20 to 25 or 30. A Plot Point is always a function of the main character.

• Plot Points serve an essential purpose in the screenplay; they are a major story progression and keep the story line anchored in place.

• Plot Points do not have to be big, dynamic scenes or sequences; they can be quiet scenes in which a decision is made.

• Plot Point II is really the same as Plot Point I; it is the way to move the story forward, from Act II to Act III. It is a story progression. As mentioned, it usually occurs anywhere between pages 80 or 90 of the screenplay. The dramatic structure of the screenplay may be denned as a linear arrangement of related incidents, episodes, or events leading to a dramatic resolution. How

you utilize these structural components determines the form of your screenplay. Read and study scripts like:

• Chinatown, Network (Paddy Chayefsky)

• American Beauty

• The Shawshank Redemption (Frank Darabont)

• Sideways (Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor)

• The Matrix • Annie Hall • Lord of the Rings.

These scripts are excellent teaching aids.

The Subject You need a subject: You need more than just an idea to start writing a screenplay. You need a subject to embody and dramatize the idea. A subject is defined as an action and a character. An action is what the story is about, and a character is who the story is about.

Every screenplay has a subject—it is what the story is about. If we remember that a screenplay is like a noun, about a person in a place, doing his/her "thing," we can see that the person is the main character and doing his/her "thing" is the action.

So, when we talk about the subject of a screenplay, we're talking about an action and a character or characters. Every screenplay dramatizes an action and a character. You, as the screenwriter, must know who your movie is about and what happens to him or her. It is a primary principle in writing, not only in screenplays but in all forms of writing.

Knowing your subject is the starting point of writing the screenplay. Dramatic premise: It's essential to isolate your generalized idea into a specific dramatic premise. And that becomes the starting point of your screenplay. Reducing the story line: It may take several pages of free-association writing about your story before you can begin to grasp the essentials and reduce a complex story line to a simple sentence or two. Don't worry about it. Just keep doing it, and you will be able to articulate your story idea clearly and concisely. Creative decisions: Every creative decision must be made by choice, not necessity. If your character walks out of a bank, that's one story. If he runs out of a bank, that's another story. Your subject will find you, given the opportunity. It's very simple. Trust yourself. Just start looking for an action and a character. When you can express your idea succinctly in terms of action and character—my story is about this person, in this place, doing his/her ”thing"—you're beginning the preparation of your screenplay.

Expressing the story clearly: When you can express your idea succinctly in terms of action and character—my story is about this person, in this place, doing his/her ”thing"—you're beginning the preparation of your screenplay. The next step is expanding your subject. Fleshing out the action and focusing on the character broadens the story line and accentuates the details. Gather your material any way you can. It will always be to your advantage. Research: By doing research you acquire information. The information you collect allows you to operate from the position of choice, confidence, and responsibility. You can choose to use some, or all, or none of the material you've gathered; that's your choice, dictated by the terms of the story. Not using it because you don't have it offers you no choice at all, and will always work against you and your story.

The principle rule of storytelling: The more you know, the more you can communicate. The character's need determines the creative choices he/she makes during the screenplay, and gaining clarity about that need allows you to be more complex, more dimensional, in your character portrayal. The key to a successful screenplay, Waldo emphasized, was preparing the material. Dialogue, he said, is "perishable," because the actor can always improvise lines to make something work. But, he added forcefully, the character's dramatic need is sacrosanct. That cannot be changed, because it holds the entire story in place. Putting words down on paper, he said, is the easiest part of the screenwriting process; it is the visual conception of the story that takes so long. There are two kinds of action - physical action and emotional action. Physical action can be a battle sequence. Emotional action is what happens inside your characters during the story. Ask yourself what kind of story you are writing. Is it an outdoor action- adventure movie, or is it a story about a relationship, an emotional story? Once you determine what kind of action you're dealing with, you can move into the life of your character. First, define the dramatic need of your character.

What does your character want?

What is his/her need?

What drives him to the resolution of your story?

**The primary ingredients**: Conflict, struggle, overcoming obstacles, both inside and outside, are the primary ingredients in all drama—in comedy, too. It is the writer's responsibility to generate enough conflict to keep the reader, or the audience, interested. The job of the screenwriter is to keep the reader turning pages. The story always has to move forward, toward its resolution. And it all comes down to knowing your subject. Without action, there is no character. Action is Character. What a person does is what he is, not what he says.

**SCREENPLAY CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS**

**MY BRILLIANT CAREER by Eleanor Whitcombe**

Beyond the open door and windows, SYBYLLA, a skinny girl of sixteen-seventeen years old, with a vital if not pretty face, paces backwards and forwards, holding a stub of pencil and an old exercise book, deep in concentration, oblivious to her surroundings.

WITNESS by William Kelley & Earl W. Wallace

RACHEL LAPP. A young woman of perhaps twenty-seven. Her face is pale and drawn. In happier circumstances, although there haven’t been too many of late in Rachel’s life, we would see a robust, sensual woman of full figure, spirit and intelligence.

JOHN BOOK comes striding though the others. He is about 40, with a rangy, athletic body.

TAXI DRIVER by Paul Schrader

TRAVIS BICKLE, age 26, lean, hard, the consummate loner.

(NB - see also the First Page of the script, for a detailed character description of Travis.)

TITANIC by James Cameron

JACK DAWSON and FABRIZIO DE ROSSI, both about 20, exchange a glance as the other two players argue in Swedish.

JACK is American, a lanky drifter with his hair a little long for the standards of the times. He is also unshaven, and his clothes are rumpled from sleeping in them. He is an artist, and has adopted the bohemian style of art scene in Paris. He is also very self-possessed and sure-footed for 20, having lived on his own since 15.

The Renault stops and the LIVERIED DRIVER scurries to open the door for a YOUNG WOMAN dressed in a stunning white and purple outfit, with an enormous feathered hat. She is 17 years old and beautiful, regal of bearing, with piercing eyes. It is the girl in the drawing. ROSE. She looks up at the ship, taking it in with cool appraisal.

THELMA & LOUISE by Callie Khouri

LOUISE is a waitress in a coffee shop. She is in her early- thirties, but too old to be doing this. She is very pretty and meticulously groomed, even at the end of her shift.

LETHAL WEAPON by Shane Black

DETECTIVE ROGER MURTAUGH, seated in the bathtub. He groans, throws a towel over himself, and mutters in mock indignation. Roger is tough: An old-fashioned fighter, wears his past like a scar. Piercing eyes; cynical.

He is surrounded by his family; wife and three children, names and ages as follows: TRISH: Roughly thirty-eight. She used to be a stunner. NICK: Ten years old. Precocious. CARRIE: Age seven. Eyes like saucers. Adorable. RIANNE: Heartbreaker stuff, Seventeen. Takes your breath away folks.

THE SIXTH SENSE by M. Night Shyamalan

MALCOLM CROWE sits on the floor at the coffee table, his vest and tie on the sofa behind him. A jacket and an overcoat lay on a briefcase next to him. Malcolm is in his thirties with thick, wavy hair and striking, intelligent eyes that squint from years of intense study. His charming, easy-going smile spreads across his face.

SPIDER-MAN (unproduced - by James Cameron):

We see PETER PARKER, a pleasant faced senior who's among the top in his class. Sincere and serious, he has yet to develop a way with women.

SPIDER-MAN (produced – by David Koepp):

PETER PARKER, a 17 year old boy. High school must not be any fun for Peter, he’s one hundred per cent nerd: skinny, zitty, glasses.

A girl stands in the entrance to the alleyway. MARY-JANE WATSON, seventeen, painfully sexy already, with a knowledge and sadness that are way beyond her years.

COSI by Louis Nowra

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LEWIS, 21, handsome and shy enough to be a patient, pauses before the sign - and after taking a deep breath enters the hospital grounds.

**CHARACTER DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE:**

The character description in a feature screenplay is usually composed of:

NAME, age, physical, nationality, social, psychological.

Plus - any defining physical character traits, including props, for actors `business’.

E.g.: BIOSFEAR by J.T. Velikovsky & Adrian Van de Velde

DALE SCHRADER, late 20’s, close to being beautiful, brunette, American. Has an Oxford Ph.D in Psychobiology (animal behaviour). We’re looking at a warm, kind, loving woman, of earthy spirit and great intelligence. She fidgets with a hyena tooth that hangs on her gold necklace.

Your Film’s Central Character – Character Description:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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EXAMPLE SYNOPSIS:

THE WIZARD OF OZ by L. Frank Baum (novel The Wonderful Wizard of Oz) screenplay by Noel Langley and Florence Ryerson and Edgar Allan Woolf.

SYNOPSIS:

Dorothy Gale, 16, an attractive, spirited and energetic girl with a great love for animals, who has a little dog Toto, wants to escape the boredom of her life at home on her farm in Kansas. However when a tornado sweeps her away into a strange land called Oz, she encounters strange beings and situations and makes new friends. Finally, both in spite of - and because of - her amazing journey, she realizes there is “no place like home”.

In other words, ideally, the STORY has an engaging central character, with an intriguing dilemma, and good conflict.

THIS FILM’S PREMISE:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

who (name, age, physical, psychological).

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(defining characteristic)

wants \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

(character’s goal in the story)

However\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(the central conflict/obstacle and the turning point)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Finally, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

(how has the character changed?)

ONE-PAGE `PITCH’ CASE STUDY: OMMADAWN

by J.T. Velikovsky and Adrian Van de Velde

OMMADAWN

OMMADAWN is a science-fiction action-thriller feature film, set in the US, in the present day.

Logline: When a UFO is detected approaching Earth, and NASA scientists commit mass suicide worldwide, maverick FBI cult investigator HAL GRADY must join forces with his mentor (and estranged former lover), cult expert SAMANTHA KOUSAL, to solve the mystery within seven days - before the spacecraft lands and the Ommadawn cult's extra- terrestrial messiah walks on Earth.…

OMMADAWN is The Sum Of All Fears meets Contact. Its themes are Fatherhood and Immortality.

Plot Synopsis: Ommadawn is the story of Hal Grady, a top-gun FBI cult investigator who moves from skepticism to faith - when a bizarre and dangerous pseudo-scientific cult believes their messiah is about to arrive on Earth.

Hal is recently widowed, and is failing as a father to his 6-year old son, DYLAN. Through the story, Hal learns to love again, and discovers the real meaning of Fatherhood.

But when the Ommadawn cult’s “Mind Of God” vessel lands, containing a cosmic message from the beginning of Time itself - Hal must confront the cult’s evil, wizard-like leader DR DAVID LANG - and save no less than the future of the Universe…

OMMADAWN

FAITH IS A WEAPON…

THE ONE-PAGE PITCH

Write your Pitch down on this page.

• Title, Genre, Setting (place & time)

• Logline: the one-liner or one sentence. Usually contains the Premise.

• “When two films collide” (Film A meets Film B). And the film’s Theme.

• Plot Synopsis

• Title

**CONFLICT IS DRAMA**

Script analyst Linda Seger outlines 5 different TYPES OF CONFLICT (and the more you have in your screenplay, the better):

PERSONAL - uncertainty or self-doubt, a struggle with conscience

eg: Hamlet, 8 and ½, Crime & Punishment, Strictly Ballroom

RELATIONAL - with a love interest, family or friends, work colleagues

eg: Kramer vs Kramer, Ten Things I Hate About You, Chopper

SOCIETAL - within the character’s social environment

eg: The Castle, The Elephant Man, Philadelphia, Fight Club, Gattaca, Crocodile Dundee

SITUATIONAL - the physical environment

eg: Dead Calm, Twister, The Poseidon Adventure, Armageddon, Towering Inferno

COSMIC - versus God or Satan (or some other deity/ies)

eg: Bliss, Last Temptation of Christ, Evil Dead, The Exorcist, Ulysses

Source: Linda Seger (1994) Making a Good Script Great, 2nd Ed, Samuel French Trade, Hollywood

**CHARACTER**

People are what they do, not what they say, and therefore...

Character is ACTION!

The biggest criticism of film characters are that they are not 3-dimensional, or that they are `cardboard cut-outs’ or unbelievable. Some say there are 3 dimensions to character. They can include:

1) PHYSICAL - how they look

2) SOCIOLOGICAL - how they live

3) PSYCHOLOGICAL - how they behave

PHYSICAL - refers to aspects such as sex, height, weight, age, hair and eye color, voice, race, complexion, nationality, speech, health, any distinguishing features and manner of dress...

SOCIOLOGICAL - includes marital status, geographical origin, family background, education, occupation, interests, social contacts, religion, morality, sports, politics, intellectual capacities and ambitions...

and PSYCHOLOGICAL means their personality (extra- or introverted, a `thinking’ or a `feeling’ type), sexual preference, fantasy life, phobias, hang-ups, star sign, likes and dislikes...

SYD FIELD'S CHARACTER TEMPLATE

According to screenwriting guru Syd Field, good film characters have:

1. A Dramatic need

2. Point of view

3. Change

4. Attitude

DRAMATIC NEED - What the character REALLY WANTS in the film:

Do they get it in the end? (Y or N): \_\_

Also, viewed from another perspective:

What they THINK they want:

What they REALLY (ie without knowing it) NEED:

Do they get the 2 things below, by the end of the story?

1) What they think they need?

2) What they really need?

P.O.V. - the way they SEE the world (eg Vegetarian, Devout Christian/Muslim/Buddhist/Scientologist, Conscientious Objector, Dreamer/ Idealist/Sociopath/Saint etc)

CHANGE - (eg over the course of the story of the film - To go from Loser to Winner (eg The Hustler, Rocky), from Not Trusting people to Trusting, Introvert to Extrovert, Intolerant to Tolerant, Shy to Confident, Emotionally Withdrawn to Loving, etc)

ATTITUDE - Positive or Negative/ Superior or Inferior, Cynical or Naive, Critical or Supportive, Pessimistic or Optimistic, Happy or Sad, Strong or Weak, Tough or Soft.

3-D CHARACTER PROFILE - STRIKING POINTS

What is your main character’s name? Nickname? How does it reflect/play against their character?

NAME \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Reasoning behind the name/nickname: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Note down, in one or a few words, anything striking about the character, ie things that differentiate or separates them from other characters in the film... what makes them an INTERESTING CHARACTER?

PHYSICAL (eg has a limp, chain-smoker, tattoos, skinny, bodybuilder, hunchback?)

SOCIOLOGICAL (eg working class, uni Professor, a Mensa member, a Mason, or is homeless, etc).

PSYCHOLOGICAL (eg genius, autistic, schizophrenic, was raised by apes, incredibly bent sense of humour, claustrophobic, etc)

DIALOG CATCHPHRASE (Something they say a lot - eg ‘No worries’ 'Whoa.', 'Cool', 'Incontheivable!' `Fugeddaboudit' etc)

**CHARACTER ARCS**

A character arc refers to the CHANGE or GROWTH that a character goes through in the course of a screenplay: basically, their emotional development. (Film is often about characters who change, TV is often about characters who do not - or cannot.)

The obstacles they encounter in striving to achieve their goal are chosen by the writer to make the character grow. The leading character in the story usually is the person who has the furthest to go; who has to undergo the biggest change.

Most leading characters undergo a positive growth through the course of the story. Their character arc could be, for example, from fear to confidence, from cynical to trusting, from pessimist to optimist, etc.

CENTRAL QUESTION: WHAT DOES MY CHARACTER WANT?

INNER (STORY) GOAL: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

OUTER (PLOT) GOAL:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

HOW DO THEY CHANGE IN THE STORY? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

THE POINTS AT WHICH WE SEE THEM CHANGING: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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WHAT WILL THEY STAND TO GAIN or LOSE? (ie What are the Stakes?)

WHAT IS THEIR PYRRHIC VICTORY? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**THE HERO or PROTAGONIST** The hero is often the most likable and easily related-to character. He or she has `rooting interest’, namely is someone to cheer for, e.g. Crocodile Dundee, Babe, Muriel Heslop. Alternately they can be an anti-hero, like Chopper, Mickey & Mallory, or Travis Bickle.

The hero is the one who undergoes the greatest character growth or has the biggest transformational character arc, and in most Hollywood films, the hero rarely dies. In many Australian ones, he/she does: Breaker Morant, Phar Lap, Gallipoli, Picnic At Hanging Rock, etc.

To have rooting interest, a hero must have AUDIENCE EMPATHY. Ways to engender empathy from audience include creating a Hero who has such qualities as:

VULNERABILITY Underdog status Loyalty Morals Ethics Altruism Death of a loved one - but mostly, COURAGE.

THE ANTAGONIST (or Shadow, or Villain, or `Bad Guy’)

The antagonist is, rather obviously, the character who opposes the Hero.

“The devil gets all the best lines…”

Memorable bad guys:

Australian films: Chopper (Chopper), The Humungus (Mad Max 2), Ned Kelly (Story of the Kelly Gang), Brett Sprague (The Boys), Simon O’Reilly (The Bank), Eddie Fleming (The Interview), Hughie Warriner (Dead Calm).

But Australian films are also renowned for having a group or `entity’ antagonist (such as authority) rather than a sole main nemesis character.

Memorable Australian antagonist `entities’: the British (Gallipoli, Breaker Morant), society (Priscilla, The Sum of Us, Sally Marshall Is Not An Alien), the airport (The Castle), the authorities (Rabbit Proof Fence, Sunday Too Far Away), the environment (Burke & Wills, Picnic At Hanging Rock, Crocodile Dundee).

American: Hannibal Lecter, Commodus, Kieser Soze/Verbal Kint, Max Cady, Hans Gruber, Mr Blonde, Darth Vader, The Emperor, Cal Hockley, Freddy Krueger, The T- 1000, The Agent (The Matrix), The Witch (Snow White), Cruella De Ville, Saruman, Valdemort.

**CHARACTER PROFILE WORKSHEETS**

CHARACTER NAME:.......................................................

PHYSIOLOGICAL

HEIGHT: WEIGHT: AGE:

COMPLEXION: NATIONALITY/RACE/ETHNICITY:

CASTING TYPE:

SPEECH: MANNERISMS:

HEALTH:

ADDICTIONS:

HANDICAPS OR IMPAIRMENTS:

DIST. FEATURES, MARKS OR SCARS:

MANNER OF DRESS:

SOCIOLOGICAL

MARITAL STATUS: GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN:

FAMILY BACKGROUND:

EDUCATION:

ECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND STATUS:

OCCUPATION:

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:

PAST OCCUPATIONS:

INTERESTS:

SOCIAL CONTACTS:

PETS:

CAR:

SPORTS/HOBBIES:

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PSYCHOLOGICAL

CHARACTER ‘HOLE’:

SPECIAL GIFTS/TALENTS:

RELIGION:

STAR SIGN:

ARCHETYPE:

ENNEAGRAM TYPE:

HIPPOCRATIC HUMOUR:

MORALITY:

PHOBIA/FEARS:

SECRET:

FANTASY LIFE:

HANGUPS OR PROBLEMS:

VALUES:

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:

LIKES OR DISLIKES:

PARADOXES:

OTHER NOTES OF INTEREST:

**CHARACTER INTERVIEW**

CHARACTER NAME.......................…………………….....……….

Describe yourself, in 25 words or less.

Who are the most important (or prominent) people in your life - and how do they see you? And how do they treat you?

What single incident(s) in your childhood has most affected you Positively?

And how about - Negatively?

How do you feel about/relate to - your parents?

What's your attitude towards sex? Are you abstinent/healthy/promiscuous, etc?

Thoughts on religion? Is there a God? Are you religious?

State your 'Philosophy of Life', or the "code' you live by, if any.

How would you spend a million dollars today?

Describe your favourite hobby/s.

Describe what you hate the most.

What do you fear the most?

What do you love the most, in Life?

How do other people react to you on meeting you?

List your proudest achievement in Life. - And Why?

What are you most ashamed of, and have never/rarely told?

Describe your favourite fantasy.

Describe what you try hardest to avoid.

Who has had the greatest influence on you? (e.g. real person/ parent/ teacher/ fictional character/novelist, entrepreneur, singer/pop star/actor/artist,etc)

What are your chief taboos? (things you never do, for moral reasons)

What kind of person would you ultimately like to be remembered as?

How far away from this ideal are you?

What, if anything, is worth dying for?

What makes life truly worthwhile?

What's your attitude towards:

Money?

Drugs?

Politics?

The Government?

Reincarnation? Ghosts? Aliens? Anything paranormal.

Abortion?

Computers & technology (including the WWW)?

Anything else you feel strongly about/want to bring up here?

How do you foresee your future?

Are you popular? Are you self-centred?

What is your favourite movie/s - and why? (minimum of 1, maximum of 3 please)

Your favourite songs, and albums, performers - and why? (max of 3)

Your favourite book and why? (max of 3)

What's your job/occupation - and how do you feel about it? And - How and why did you get into it? Plan to stay in it? Ideally, what's the future hold careerwise?

What do you do in your spare time?

Who is your perfect love/romance partner/s? And why?

Describe in about 25 words, your best friend, (eg What do they do for a living, hobbies, talents) what kind of person are they, and why do you like them?

What's your own best talent, do you think?

And what do others around you see as your "best point'? Do you agree?

And finally - "What do you think Humanity's Purpose on Earth is'? (ie Personal view of The Meaning of Life)

Last question. While you've got the microphone, is there anything else you want to say, off the top of your head?

**CREATE 5 MEMORABLE SCENES**

As a Writer, you now know intimately your main character’s likes and dislikes, loves, hopes and fears.

In creating your story’s plot, think of 5 circumstances that would elicit a very strong reaction from your character. (love, hate, fear, anger, amusement)

Thus, create 5 memorable scenes, in line with your story’s THEME.

Answer in 2 parts: A) What event/circumstance/situation occurs? And B) How do they react?

1. A)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

B)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. A)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

B)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. A)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

B)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

4. A)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

B)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

5. A)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

B)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**GENRE IN FILMS**

The golden rule of genre in feature films:

“Deliver the genre” at least once every reel (i.e. approx every ten minutes.)

Genres are how studios market their films, and how audiences know what type of emotional experience to expect in the cinema. E.g.

• Action-adventure – Crocodile Dundee, Raiders of The Lost Ark

• Romantic Comedy – Strictly Ballroom, Mrs Doubtfire

• Horror – Razorback, Halloween H20

• Film Noir – The Interview, Seven

• Science Fiction – Incident at Raven’s Gate, Contact

• Fantasy - Dark City, Star Wars

• Children’s – Sally Marshall Is Not An Alien, Babe, The Lion King

- and there are many other genres, including of course the Western which seems to have died out in recent years.

Some theorists believe the popularity of genres runs in 20-year cycles. Witness the `disaster’ movies of the 70’s and 90’s, and the horror films of the 60’s and 80’s.

Each genre has its own inherent set of meanings:

• Detective films often assert that Crime Doesn’t Pay.

• Romantic Comedies usually imply that Love Conquers All.

• Horror tells us that `Breaking taboos brings dire consequences’.

• Sci-Fi often posits “technology as humanity’s savior”.

• Westerns often employ the Old Testament morality of “Revenge”.

- Writers choose their genre to help convey their themes. - Studios choose genres to market their films. - Audiences choose genres to gain an emotional experience.

**RICHARD MICHAELS – MEGAHIT STRUCTURE**

In a 120-page script:

Prelude = 10 pages Act 1 = 30 pages Act 2 = 45 pages Act 3 = 30 pages Resolution = 5 pages

In the Prelude, the first ten pages of the screenplay, the writer must "hook" the audience by creating empathy for the protagonist, hatred for the antagonist, and establish the primary objective of the story. This is the most important section of the screenplay.

In Act One the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist is further developed up to the first plot twist.

In Act Two the conflict is further "complicated" up through the second major plot twist. By this time about 85 minutes of screen time will have passed.

In Act Three the climatic battle between the protagonist and antagonist will occur. The action will be extremely intense and very fast, ending with the victory of the hero over the villain.

The Resolution scene of the story will be the shortest, showing that the protagonist has achieved his primary objective and showing his victory being celebrated by the community.

**Viki King's INNER MOVIE METHOD**

Viki King’s The Inner Movie Method: How To Write a Screenplay In 21 Days builds on the `screenplay paradigm’ work of story analysts Syd Field and Linda Seger.

1) FIRST MINUTE: (FIRST PAGE!)

In the first minute, you will know everything you need to know about a movie: you will see a place, a time, and a mood. Is it a big picture? With a musical overture and large vistas? The size and scope of the story are revealed right away. In the first minute, we also see the POINT OF VIEW. E.g. in the Dirty Harry movies; "This is a dirty world and someone’s gotta clean it up" - If possible, start with a visual metaphor for your whole story. Also, put a `page-turner’ at the bottom of the page to get the reader hooked.

We have to know who it's about, too. Start with your main character if you can.

2) Page 3 - Find a line of dialog that expresses the central theme (eg Jake Gittes in Chinatown "You have to be rich to get away with murder.")

3) Pages 3 to 10 - What's it about? Whose story is it? What does he/she want? What's stopping him from getting it? Do we like him/her? Or care what happens to him? Why? (show vulnerability, engender audience empathy) Do we care if he/she gets what he wants? Are we wondering what happens next? Make sure all the main characters are introduced in the first 10 pages.

\* Page 15 – The `Inciting Incident’ – the event that triggers the story, and propels the hero into action.

4) Page 25 or 30 – The First Turning Point. The story takes a sharp left turn. First Act ends. The Second Act begins…

5) Page 45 - The `Act 2 metaphor’ (a symbolic scene or action that gives a clue to the story’s resolution.

6) Page 60 – The `Point of no return’ – our Hero commits totally to his/her goal After this, a lighter moment; breathing space. Show the hero changing.

7) Page 75 - a New Development – the hero's just about to give up...

8) Page 90 – The Second Turning Point, end of Act 2 - an event that "educates" the hero about how to achieve their goal. They have an epiphany. Act 3 begins…

9) The Climax – 95-110. The hero can see their goal, but faces the final obstacle – the final moment of truth – all or nothing. They find their inner strength, and devotion to something bigger than themself.

10) The End – i.e. last 3-5 pages – The Resolution. Remember - the goal is to touch the audience deeply, and affect them profoundly.

**QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BEFORE YOU WRITE:**

1. What’s the name of your story’s central character/s?

2. Why do you care about them? (ie and Why will we, your audience care about them, their situation, and their story?)

3. Exactly how (and when) in your story do we become emotionally involved with them?

4. What is the world - and the backstory - of your story? The genre? The tone (eg warm and nostalgic, or gritty and confronting)? The style (realism, expressionism)?

5. What does your Protagonist want in the beginning? But what does he/she need? And what does he/she get in the end?

6. Six months into the Backstory (before the first page of your script), what was the Protagonist's goal? Is it different to the goal at the start of your script? (ie Are you starting the story too early, or late?)

7. Who or what is stopping the Protagonist from accomplishing their goal in the film?

8. What is the Opening Situation for the Protagonist?

9. By the first 10-15 pages, what is the `Inciting Incident’ or `kicker’? What kicks the story into gear?

10. By page 25, what is your first plot point?

11. What is the `midpoint’ of the story? Is the hero at rock bottom here?

12. What will the emotional climax of your story be?

13. Who is your Antagonist? Why will we hate them? When do we hate them? Is your Antagonist the `mirror opposite’ or shadow of the Protagonist?

14. How is it shown that the Antagonist - and other characters - come from a different world than the Protagonist (i.e. Differentiate the characters, especially their dialogue.)

15. What is the most interesting thing about this story subject to you? And Why will it interest 3 million other people?

16. What emotions will the audience feel at the start, middle, and end of your story? Explain the emotional journey you have planned for them

**THE `15 COMMANDMENTS’**

OF FEATURE FILM SCREENWRITING

\* THEME IS PARAMOUNT!

\* DRAMA IS CONFLICT!

\* STRUCTURE IS EVERYTHING!

\* A SCREENPLAY: A STORY TOLD WITH PICTURES

\* SHOW, DON'T TELL!

\* RAISE THE STAKES!

\* MAKE THE CHARACTERS 3-DIMENSIONAL

\* ACTION IS CHARACTER!

\* FORESHADOW & PAYOFF!

\* SUSPENSE, SURPRISE, REVERSALS, TWISTS

\* SCENES: COME IN LATE, LEAVE EARLY

\* ACTION LINES: SHORT, CONTROLLED BURSTS

\* USE DIALOGUE ONLY AS A LAST RESORT

\* DON'T WRITE SUBTEXT!

\* WRITING IS REWRITING

**The scene**

"A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself"

**Good scenes make good movies.** When you think of a good movie, you remember scenes, not the entire film.

**The scene is the single most important element in your screenplay**. It is where something happens—where something specific happens. It is a particular unit, or cell, of dramatic (or comédie) action—the place in which you tell your story.

**The purpose of the scene is twofold**: Either it moves the story forward or it reveals information about the character. If the scene does not satisfy one, or both, of these two elements, then it doesn't belong in the screenplay.

**It is the story that determines** how long or how short your scene is. There is only one rule to follow: Tell your story. The scenes will be as long or as short as they need to be; just trust the story and it will tell you everything you need to know.

**Place and time**

Two things are necessary in every scene— place and time. They are the two components that hold things in context. Every scene occurs at a specific place and at a specific time.

**Time:** What time of the day or night does your scene take place? In the morning? Afternoon? Late at night? All you have to do is specify either day or night. But sometimes you may want to be more specific: sunrise, early morning, late morning, midafternoon, sunset, or dusk. All you need to indicate is DAY or NIGHT.

If you change either place or time, it becomes a new scene. Why? Because each time you change one of these elements, you have to change the lighting of the scene and, almost always, the camera placement **Place:** If your scene takes place in a house, and you move from the bedroom to the kitchen to the living room, you have three individual scenes.

**Scene construction**: A scene can be constructed in several different ways, depending on the type of story you're telling. For many types of scenes you can build the action in terms of beginning, middle, and end; a character enters the place—restaurant, school, home—and the scene unfolds in linear time, much the way a screenplay unfolds.

Or you can begin a scene, cut away to a flashback, as in The Bourne Supremacy or Ordinary People, then bring it back to the present and end it in real time.

**Reveal**: Every scene must reveal one element of necessary story information to the reader or audience; remember, the purpose of the scene is to either move the story forward or to reveal information about the character. Rarely does a scene provide more than one piece of information.

**There are two kinds of scenes.** One is where something happens visually, the other is a dialogue scene between two or more characters. Most scenes are a combination.

**Dialogue length**: most dialogue scenes need be no longer than two or three pages.

**Your story always moves forward**: Within the body of the scene, something specific happens— your characters move from point A to point B in terms of emotional growth or reaching a decision; or your story links point A to point B in terms of the narrative line of action, the plot. Your story always moves forward, even if parts of it are told in flashback.

**The flashback** is a technique used to expand the audience’s comprehension of story, characters, and situation. The purpose of the flashback is the same as the scene—either it moves the story forward or it reveals information about the characters.

**Creating a scene**

How do you go about creating a scene? First create the context of the scene, then determine the content, what happens.

• What is the purpose of the scene?

• Why is it there? How does it move the story forward?

• What happens within the body of the scene?

• Where has the character just been before he enters the scene? What are the emotional forces working on the character during the scene?

• Do they impact the purpose of the scene?

• What is his/her purpose in the scene?

• Why is he/she there? To move the story forward or to reveal information about the character?

By creating context, you determine dramatic purpose and can build your scene line by line, action by action. By creating context, you establish content. How do you do this? By finding the components or elements within the scene. What aspect of your character's professional life, personal life, or private life is going to be revealed?

**Against the grain**: When you're approaching a scene, look for a way that dramatizes the scene "against the grain" or a location that could make it visually interesting.

When you're preparing to write a scene:

1. First establish the purpose

2. Then find the components, the elements contained within the scene

3. Then determine the content

Within the context of the scene you can influence tone, feeling, and mood by the descriptions you write. In comedy, you can't have your characters playing for laughs; they have to believe what they’re doing, otherwise it becomes forced and contrived, and therefore unfunny. In comedy, Woody Allen says, "Acting funny is the worst thing you can do."

Comedy, like drama, depends on "real people in real situations." When you set out to write a scene, find the purpose of the scene and root it in place and time. Then establish the context and determine the content, and find the elements or components within the scene to build it and MAKE IT WORK.

**SCENE LENGTH or, How Long Is a Piece of 2-inch String?**

George Lucas once said:

"Sixty great two-minute scenes make a successful movie”.

As a guide, you should have about 15 scenes in your first act, 30 in the second, and 15 in the third - namely: a total of sixty scenes, with an average scene length of two pages (i.e. and average of two minutes per scene).

Each of these scenes usually contains a plot `beat’.

There is no lower limit to scene length (a short scene’s often a good scene), but as for an upper limit, four pages is a pretty long scene.

The golden rule with writing each scene is:

COME IN LATE, and LEAVE EARLY.

This means you don’t have to show someone knocking on a door, waiting for it to be answered, have characters introduce themselves, and then begin a conversation…

Instead, have the `point of attack’ in each scene as late as possible – namely try to cut into the scene when they are in the middle of the conversation, and stay only long enough to get the crucial story information out, and then cut out of the scene. These days, audiences assume a great deal.

THE STRUCTURE OF EACH SCENE

Each scene should have a beginning, middle and end - and should do 4 things:

1) give new information (and/or reveal character) 2) involve bonding (the audience with the characters) 3) include conflict (or conflict resolution) 4) aid completion (i.e. move the story forward)

ON PACING YOUR SCENES

Juxtapose a long, slow scene (or sequence of scenes)- with a short, fast one. Pacing and rhythm is crucial to keep the viewer hooked.

EXPOSITION

Exposition (or the Set-Up) is that part of your script which explains the dramatic situation: anything relevant has gone before, and it also sets up (or identifies) the main characters and their relationships to each other.

Try to have your story’s exposition revealed through a scene with underlying conflict or overt action going on, rather than just two or more “talking heads”:

e.g.

The Fellowship of the Ring – Gandalf explains `the ring situation’ to Frodo while the black riders are outside, searching for it…

Raiders of the Lost Ark – the dissertation about the Lost Ark, and why it must be found before the Nazis get to it, is given to some `ignorant’ outsiders (army intelligence), so that Indy can become “Morrie the Explainer” in a lecture room.

Terminator – the “time travel and Terminator robot” scenario is explained to Sarah Connor during a car chase while actually escaping from it.

Titanic – the crew are shouting on a ship’s deck, during a submarine recovery operation.

SUMMARIZE YOUR EXPOSITION SCENE:

**Dialogue**

Dialogue is a function of character: Remember that dialogue is a function of character. Let's review the purpose of dialogue:

• Moves the story forward

• Reveals information about the characters—after all, they do have a history

• Communicates necessary facts and information to the reader

• Establishes character relationships, making them real, natural, and spontaneous

• Gives your characters depth, insight, and purpose

• Reveals the conflicts of the story and characters

• Reveals the emotional states of your characters

• Comments on the action

**Characters start talking to you**: It takes anywhere from forty to fifty pages before your characters start talking to you. And they do start talking to you. Let yourself write shitty pages, with stilted, direct, dumb, and obvious dialogue. Don't worry about it. Just keep writing. Dialogue can always be cleaned up during the rewrite. "Writing is rewriting" is the ancient adage.

**New scenes:** I said in Chapter 12 that one card equals one scene, but when you're writing the screenplay, that will be contradictory. You'll suddenly "discover" a new scene that works better or that you hadn't thought of. Use it. It will lead you to veer off the path of the cards into a few new scenes or sequences that you hadn't even considered.

It doesn't matter if you want to drop scenes or add new ones; just do it. Your creative mind has assimilated the cards so you can throw out a few scenes and still be following the direction of your story. When you're doing the cards, you're doing the cards. When you’re writing the screenplay, you're writing the screenplay.

**All drama is conflict**: without conflict, you have no action; without action you have no character; without character, you have no story.

And without story, you have no screenplay. Dramatic conflict can be either internal or external:

External conflict is where the conflict is outside the characters and they face physical (and of course, emotional) obstacles.

Creating conflict within the story, through the characters and events, is one of those simple, basic "truths" of all writing, whether it be novel, play, or screenplay.

Conflict can be anything: a struggle, a quarrel, a battle, or a chase scene; fear of life, or fear of failure or success; internal or external— any kind of confrontation or obstacle, and it really doesn't matter whether it's emotional, physical, or mental. Conflict must be at the very hub of your story, because it is the core of strong action and strong character.

**FEATURE FILM LAYOUT**

Screenplays are designed to be read, so the layout and presentation of the script is therefore crucial.

The script must be typed either in Courier 12-point font. (Pica is also accepted in the USA.)

Layout for feature film scripts is as follows:

\* A 1-inch margin, top and bottom, left and right.

\* SCENE HEADINGS are always written thus:

INT. KANE’S OFFICE - DAY

where firstly the writer indicates either INT. (i.e. interior, or indoors) or EXT. (exterior, or outdoors), followed by the location (e.g. KANE’S OFFICE) and the time of day (i.e. DAY or NIGHT, or sometimes MORNING, AFTERNOON, DUSK or DAWN)

\* STAGE DIRECTIONS are typed all the way across the page.

\* CHARACTER NAMES are not actually centered, but placed 5 tab stops across the page, i.e. near the center, but left-justified

\* PARENTHETICALS (actor instructions) are 4 tabs across, e.g.

KANE

(furious)

Get out!

but the less they are used the better, as they can be seen to tell an actor or director how to do their job.

• CAMERA DIRECTIONS are in UPPER CASE, (e.g. CLOSE ON, WIDE ANGLE ON, CAMERA PUSHES IN ON) but also should only be used when absolutely necessary, otherwise again, you as the writer are “directing from the page”, telling the director how to do his job.

• The general rule of thumb for script timing in this format is `one page equals one minute’, so 120 pages roughly equals two hours

Good luck!!

Reference books

j.t. velikovsky. “Guide to Writing Feature Films”

- Syd Field. “Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting”

How To Write A Screenplay in 21 Days by Viki King