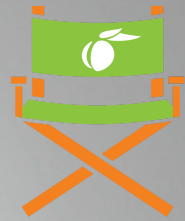


GEORGIAFILM  
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# STORY



Substance, Structure, Style, and the  
Principles of Screenwriting  
By: Robert McKEE



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# WHAT STORY IS AND WHAT STORY IS NOT

**STORY** is about principals, **not** rules

**STORY** is about eternal, universal forms, **not** formulas

(McKee, 1998)

**STORY** is about mastering the art, **not** second-guessing the marketplace.

**STORY** is about originality, **not** duplication

EVERY MOVIE EVER MADE ->



\*Click the image to go to the YouTube video

DRAMATIC WRITING FOR FILM, TELEVISION, AND THEATRE I

# STORY

What makes a good story?

What stories have you seen – **MOVIE** or **T.V.** – are “good” and why?

What makes a good script?

What will all **SCRIPTED** stories have?



Toy Story (1995) ©

## TED TALKS: WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY

\*Click the image to go to the Ted Talk video

STEPHANIE VERNI

AUTHOR • PROFESSOR

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY?

### FAMILIARITY

The more familiar, the more powerful your story can be.

### MEMORABLE CHARACTERS

Write characters readers will remember.

### RELIABLE NARRATOR

Readers have to trust the storyteller.

### PLOT

Hatch a plot that keeps readers engaged, and wanting to know more.

### PROBLEM

Give your character a problem.

### DRAMA AND EMOTION

Strike the right balance, and you'll write a winner.

### RELATABILITY

The more your audience can relate, the better.

### IMMERSION

Readers want to immerse themselves in the story.

### SIMPLICITY

The more simple the story, the stronger it can be.

### MEANING

Allow readers to uncover the story's meaning for themselves.



### SETTING

Choose a setting and transport your readers there.

### FIVE SENSES

Use your five senses to write strong description.





# STRUCTURE

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A selection of events from  
the characters' **LIFE**  
**STORIES** that is composed  
into a **STRATEGIC**  
**SEQUENCE** to arouse  
specific emotions and to  
express a **SPECIFIC VIEW**.

(McKee, 1998)



# EVENT

A person with short hair, seen from behind, wearing a black puffer jacket, stands on a grassy bank looking across a calm lake. The lake reflects the sky and the surrounding mountains. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains with patches of snow under a sky with soft, colorful clouds from a sunset or sunrise. Large, dark rocks are visible in the water and on the banks.

A **STORY EVENT** creates meaningful change in the life situation of a character that is expressed and experienced in terms of a **VALUE.**

(McKee, 1998)



# STORY VALUES

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The universal erosion of values has lead to the universal erosion of story.

Robert Mckee

The universal qualities of human experience that may shift from **POSITIVE** to **NEGATIVE**, or **NEGATIVE** to **POSITIVE**, from one moment to the next.

(McKee, 1998)

# A STORY EVENT

Creates **MEANINGFUL**  
change in the life situation  
of a character that  
expressed and experienced  
in terms of a value and  
**ACHIEVED THROUGH**  
**CONFLICT**

(McKee, 1998)

\*Click the above image to  
go to the video clip

The Matrix (1999) ©





# SCENE

An action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the **VALUE-CHARGED** condition of a character's life on at least one value with a degree of perceptible significance. Ideally, every scene is a **STORY EVENT.** (McKee, 1998)

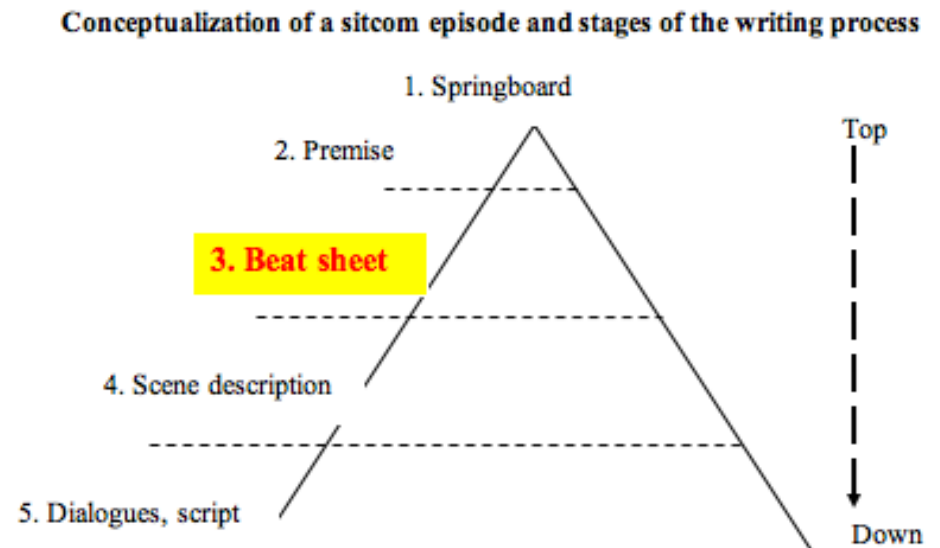
# BEAT

A **BEAT** is an exchange of behavior in action/reaction. Beat by beat these **CHANGING** behaviors shape the turning of a scene.

(McKee, 1998)

**BEAT SHEET** - In terms of a sitcom, it's also the transitional stage from the premise of an episode down to the lower level, i.e., situations or scenes. In other words, a beat sheet **formally translates the premise of an episode into actions of the future scenes**. Just like a premise develops from the spring board, scenes or situations develop from the beat sheet.

The **figure to the right** demonstrates the location of the beat sheet in the top-down process of episode writing and its conceptualization.





# BEAT continued...

A **BEAT SHEET** consists of four or five beats. Each beat is made up of two elements or sides: **EVENTS** or **ACTIONS** on the one hand, and characters' **REACTIONS** to them, on the other hand. It dictates actions in general and what the characters do in response to certain events or actions.

This figure presents the formal structure of a beat sheet:

|        |                  |                      |
|--------|------------------|----------------------|
| Beat 1 | Action / event 1 | Character's reaction |
| Beat 2 | Action / event 2 | Character's reaction |
| Beat 3 | Action / event 3 | Character's reaction |
| Beat 4 | Action / event 4 | Character's reaction |
| Beat 5 | Action / event 5 | Character's reaction |

**EXAMPLE:** Friends - "The One About All the Rugby"

| Event  | Reaction   |
|--|--|
| Monica finds out about a light switch that does nothing =>   | Monica wants to find the problem.  |
| Monica gets excited and involves her friends to help her =>  | The problem with the light switch turns out to be difficult to find.   |
| Monica's friends don't help her and make fun of her =>   | Monica buys an electrical plan for the building and decides to fix the problem by herself.                                 |
| The problem gets really complicated and it takes Monica to make holes in the wall to find the loose wires =>           | Rachel gets angry with Monica (because the holes are in Rachel's apartment and Rachel doesn't care about the light switch) |
| After spending more time and money on professional electricians and getting serious electrical shocks, Monica quits => | Joey's TV starts switching on and off when he watches it with Phoebe.  |



\*Click the above image to go to the video clip

# SEQUENCE

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A **SEQUENCE** is a series of **SCENES** – generally two to five – that **CULMINATES** with greater impact than any previous scene.

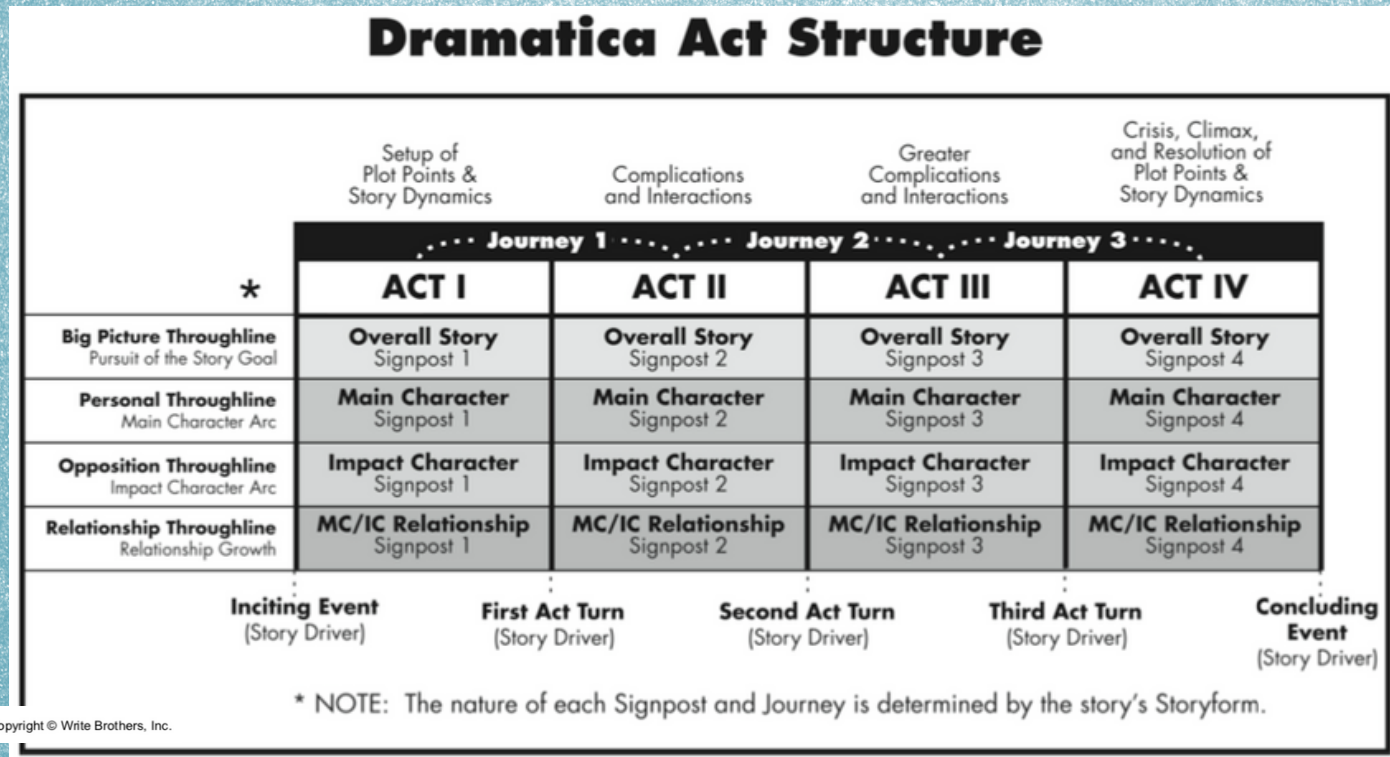
(McKee, 1998)




# ACT

An **ACT** is a series of **SEQUENCES** that peaks in a climactic scene which causes a major **REVERSAL** of values, more powerful in its impact than any previous sequence or scene.

(McKee, 1998)







\*Click the image to go  
to the video clip

A **STORY** is a series of acts that build  
to a last act climax or **STORY CLIMAX**  
which brings about **ABSOLUTE** and  
**IRREVERSIBLE** change. (McKee, 1998)



# HOMEWORK

**Watch an episode of your favorite  
(SCHOOL APPROPRIATE)  
Television Show and create your  
own **BEAT SHEET****