

STORY PROGRESSION



GEORGIAFILM
ACADEMY®

DRAMATIC WRITING FOR FILM, TELEVISION, AND THEATRE I

STORY PROGRESSION

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A **SCRIPT** IS THE **VEHICLE** FOR THE **STORY**

In order to **REALIZE** what writing
you **WANT** to do and **HOW** to do it:

SCRIPT FORM and **ACT**
FORM are **IMPORTANT**



WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE WE "ACT"

REVIEW OF WHAT WE KNOW

BEAT

Inside the scene is the **smallest element** of structure – the **BEAT**. An exchange of behavior in action/reaction. **BEAT** by **BEAT** these **changing behaviors** shape the turning of a **SCENE**.

SCENES

BEATS build **SCENES**, then **SCENES** build the next **LARGEST** movement of story design, **SEQUENCE**.

SEQUENCE

SERIES of **SCENES** – generally two to five – that **culminates** with **GREATER IMPACT** than any **previous scene**.

NOTE

Every **TRUE SCENE** turns the value-charged condition of the **CHARACTER'S LIFE**, but from **event** to **event**, the degree of change can **differ GREATLY**.

THE ACT

HOW IT ROLLS...

SCENES turn in minor but **SIGNIFICANT** ways;

A series of scenes builds a **SEQUENCE** that turns in a moderate, more **IMPACTFUL** way;

A **SERIES OF SEQUENCES** builds the next largest structure, the **ACT**, a movement that turns on a **MAJOR** reversal in the value-charged condition of the character's life.

DEFINITION

An **ACT** is a series of sequences that **PEAKS** in a **CLIMATIC** scene which causes a **MAJOR** reversal of **VALUES**, more **POWERFUL** in its impact than any previous **SEQUENCE** or **SCENE**.

**WHY ARE ACTS
IMPORTANT? In movies?
In television?**

MOVIES

Most movies have **GRAND** stories with a **CONCLUSION**
i.e. **MOVIES** have a **3 ACT STRUCTURE**

ACT 1 – BEGINNING

ACT 2 – MIDDLE

ACT 3 – END

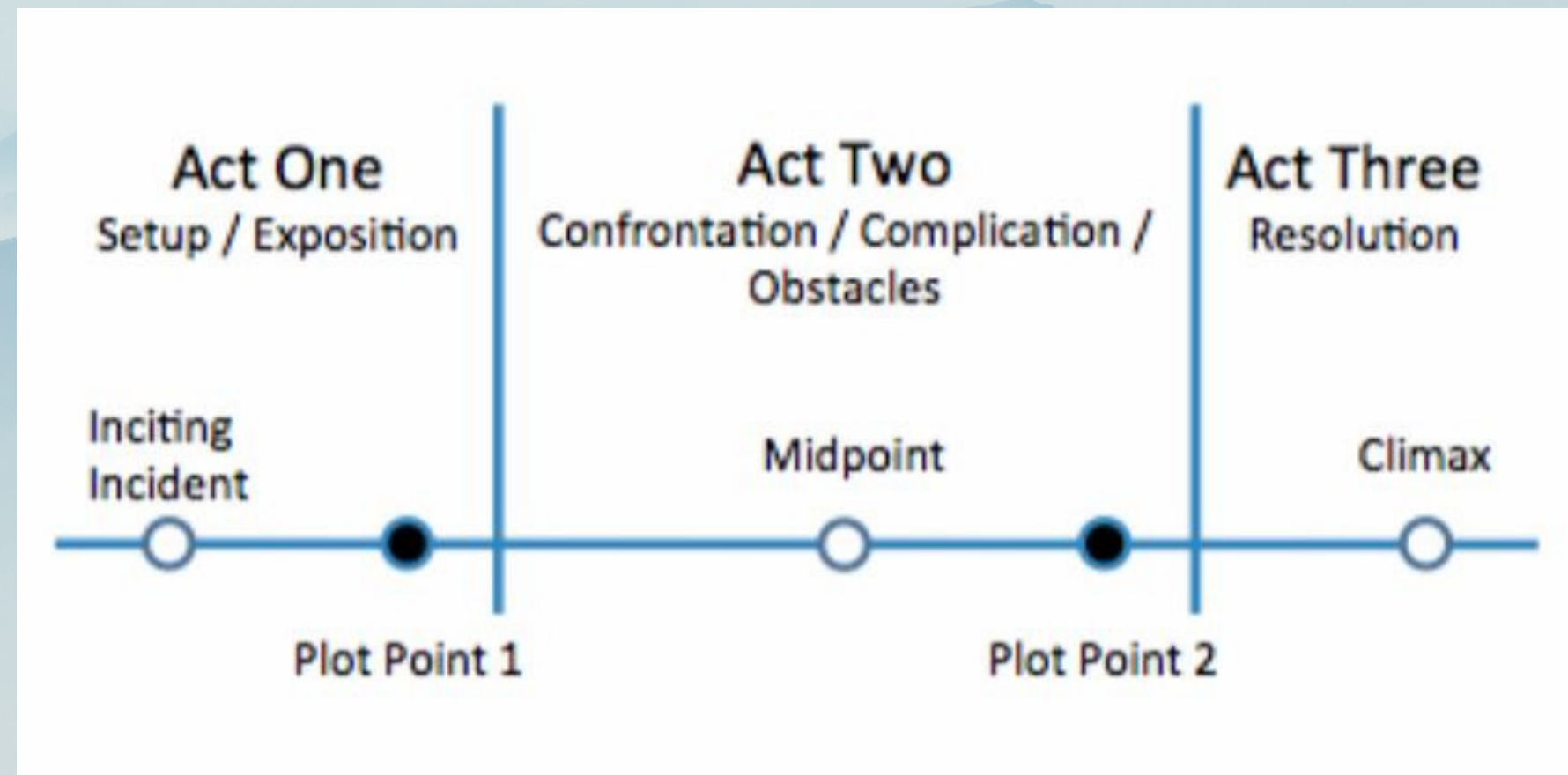
Toy Story (1995) © Disney Pixar

3 ACTS

ACT 1 – BEGINNING "**SET UP**"

ACT 2 – MIDDLE "**CONFRONTATION**"

ACT 3 – END "**RESOLUTION**"



© Created by Tamlin Hall.
Writer/Director.
www.thehouseatl.com

ACT 1: THE SETUP

IN THE FIRST **TEN PAGES**....

- **MAJOR CHARACTERS** are introduced
- **REASON** and **LOGIC** are defined
- **LOCATION** is made clear
- **GENRE** is established
- Sometimes, **REALITY** is **DISTORTED**
- A **STRONG** hook.

INCITING INCIDENT

Between pages **10** and **16** of a script is a good target for an event to happen that **PROVOKES** some sort of change in a **PROTAGONIST'S** “ordinary world” routine, an experience that will **CHALLENGE** him/her.

EXAMPLE: in Spielberg's, “E.T.”, our young protagonist, Elliott, discovers an Extra-Terrestrial in his own town

PLAY

*Click PLAY to go to the YouTube video

© Tamlin Hall

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (1982) ©

ACT 2: CONFRONTATION

SUBPLOT

The **SUBPLOT** is a **B-STORY** to the A-story taking place **THROUGHOUT** the narrative. The subplot is **RELEVANT** to the **NARRATIVE** and overall **THEME** of the screenplay.

MIDPOINT

At the end of Act Two, the **PROTAGONIST** will experience an “**all is lost**” moment. This is when the protagonist is at the **LOWEST**. Simply stated, this is when things are the **WORST** for your main character.

EXAMPLE: In Lilo and Stitch, Stitch was beginning to find his place with his human family when he is told to get out, and he reads from “The Ugly Duckling,” realizing that he, too, is lost.

PLAY

***Click PLAY to go to the YouTube video**

Lilo and Stitch (2002) ©

© Tamlin Hall

ACT 3: RESOLUTION

Slumdog Millionaire © (2008)

Act Three presents the **CLIMAX** of the movie, then the **RESOLUTION**. This act is usually the shortest in length because quickly after the second **TURNING POINT** at the end of Act 2, the **PROTAGONIST** is near a showdown with the **ANTAGONIST**. After the climax, the screenwriter will offer a **RESOLUTION** to the story. The resolution should be **SHORT** and **SWEET**.

© Tamlin Hall

EXAMPLE: In Slumdog Millionaire, Jamal and Latika, the two long-lost lovers, are reunited at the train station.

PLAY

*Click PLAY to go to the YouTube video

HALF HOUR SHOWS

3 ACTS, often with a **TEASER**
and a **TAG** at the end.

Exceptions:

Modern Family – which uses
4 acts vs. **3 acts** and **a tag**.

Modern Family (2011-) ©

ONE HOUR STRUCTURE

A woman with dark hair tied back is shown from the chest up, covering her mouth with both hands in a gesture of shock or surprise. She is wearing a dark grey zip-up jacket. The background is a dimly lit room with a large painting of a horse's head on the left and a window with red curtains on the right. Numerous white feathers are floating in the air around her.

4 Acts → 5 Acts → **6 Acts**

Chasing Life, Scandal,
Vampire Diaries, and
Arrow are all **6 ACTS**

The Vampire Diaries (2009-2017) ©

HOW CAN YOU TELL?

The **easiest** way to determine the number of acts in any show is to simply watch one and note when the **commercial breaks** appear.

If they're about **1-2 minutes**, that's a **TEASER** or a **TAG**. If they're **5-10 minutes**, that's a **FULL ACT**.



HOW DO YOU WANT TO TELL YOUR STORY?

Is **DIALOGUE** best or **ACTION**?

Where do **YOU** start
(**BEGINNING? MIDDLE?**)

Start with **ACTION**?

(**ALIAS**) [\(click to go to script\)](#)

Or **DIALOGUE**?

(**30 Something**) [\(click to go to script\)](#)

HEAR FROM **JEFF STEPAKOFF** [\(click to go to bio\)](#)
PLAY

ASSIGNMENT

- 1. Find a great script and break it down according to structure, paying special attention to these building blocks: opening, the inciting incident, the first act turn, the midpoint turn, the second act turn, and the ending.**
- 2. Time to write your own outline for your **FIFTEEN PAGE SCREENPLAY!** Lay out your story using bullet points and focus on the building blocks listed in the presentation.**