NYU Los Angeles
Script Analysis: Industry Focus
IMFTV-UT 1084 LA1

Instructor Information

- Jane Goldenring
- Email:
- Office Hours: (Please email for appointments)

Course Information

- Script Analysis: Industry Focus
- IMFTV-UT 1084 LA1
- Wednesdays 6-9 pm
- Room:

Course Overview and Goals

The goal of Script Analysis at NYU LA is two-fold:

1.) To understand how a screenplay works. This will be achieved by analyzing narrative structure and other important elements that contribute to the success of a film, such as character and plot development, sense of place, dialogue, use of a particular genre, tone and uniqueness.

2.) To evaluate completed scripts prior to their production and provide Coverage and Analysis of scripts as potential properties from the perspective of buyers and other interested parties (eg., producers, production companies, talent, agencies, etc.)

Upon Completion of this Course, students will be able to:

- Understand and apply different act structures (Three Act to Five Act).
- Understand and apply a number of different narrative structural templates.
- Understand and apply act breaks, turning points and reversals.
- Understand and apply specific scene functions (e.g., exposition, emotional or physical turning point).
- Understand and apply plot and character dynamics: backstory, defining moments/weaknesses, goals and/or dreams.
- Understand the characteristics of all the major genres and hybrid genres.
- Understand the functions of dialogue.
- Learn to intelligently and constructively evaluate a feature length screenplay with an eye toward balanced criticism.
Additionally:
- Students will synopsize, criticize and complete coverage for at least 3 screenplays.
- Students will write a set of notes describing one possible direction for a re-write of a screenplay applying the ideas discussed in class.

NOTE: WEEKS 1-6 will focus on narrative fundamentals, tools of analysis and structural conceits. WEEKS 7-14 will be devoted to putting analysis and understanding into practice by writing professional-grade coverage and notes for the writer.

METHODOLOGY

Each class will be divided up into lecture, discussion, in-class student presentations, and screenings; we will view clips, scenes and sequences from a range of media including shorts, features, and TV and streaming.

Course Requirements

Grading Policy

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments/Activities</th>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism: punctuality and ability to meet deadlines</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage/Analysis assignments</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitching/role-playing assignments</td>
<td>20%</td>
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*Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

Course Schedule

Topics and Assignments

WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION/WHAT MAKES A GREAT MOVIE OR TV SHOW?

Come to class prepared to introduce yourself and discuss your favorite popcorn movies and TV shows (ones you can't resist seeing when they're on); a film or TV show we might be surprised you like; your least favorite movie or TV shows; and the first show or film that inspired you. We want to hear how your life has influenced your taste in what you watch and why you have an interest in being involved in entertainment.
What are the common elements of merit worthy stories? Where do great ideas come from and how do you know what’s a good idea? And once you start working on the script, how can you best assess and develop a project to bring it from page to screen?

We will discuss the “log-line” and its importance, not just to coverage, but also to the basic art of pitching. There will be an overview of the class and a general discussion of story analysis and development – why it’s so important and how critical it is no matter what position you hold in the industry.

Reading Assignments for Week 2:

Vogler and Aronson excerpts

MOVIE to watch for next class:

WEEK 2: THE HERO’S JOURNEY – IT STARTS WITH THE CHARACTERS

Discuss the Hero’s Journey as a guiding principle of storytelling – an amalgam of common elements that are most easily discernable in myths, fairytales and our favorite stories. Knowing those elements is an essential part of story analysis and development. Discuss assigned movie in this context. What is the monomyth – the quest taken by the hero? What is the story engine? What are the wants and needs of the protagonist(s)? What are the key flaws of the main characters that will potentially interfere with the objective? What are the major obstacles?

Reading Assignments for Week 3:

Story – pp. 135-207, 208-232, 317-333
Vogler and Aronson excerpts
Script from Blacklist – one TV and one film
Assignment for Week 3 – Write character profiles for protagonists in assigned scripts.

WEEK 3 – CREATING MEMORABLE CHARACTERS, CHARACTER ARCS AND AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION WITH CHARACTERS

Protagonists and antagonists have journeys where some kind of change is usually inevitable. The exception to that rule is the antagonist as juggernaut. The reader/viewer should be invested in the characters’ journeys and the way to do that is to give them arcs so we can be involved in their struggle.

Examples of memorable villains and why they are fascinating. Types of villains, the obstacles that are created and how they apply to film and TV projects. Can they sustain interest for a series or limited series?

In Class: Discuss character development in assigned scripts and viewing
Breakdown assigned scripts/viewing examples using the Blake Snyder Beat Sheet.

Reading Assignments for Week 4:
WEEK 4 – ACT STRUCTURE FOR FILMS AND TV

What are the basic elements for structuring a screenplay and a pilot – act breaks. Plotting pitfalls.

What is the the hook? What is the inciting incident? What are the major turning points and/or choices? Act 1/revelation, midpoint set piece, Act 2 Crisis, Act 3 climax & resolution. Defining cause and effect. McKee – Have rules so that you can break them.

In Class: Breakdown assigned scripts

Guest Speaker: Writer who will discuss differences and similarities in writing for TV and film and what to look for in terms of analyzing scripts.

Reading Assignments for Week 5:

TEXT: Story pp 252-287
The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers
Blacklist scripts: Film and TV

The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers

WEEK 5 – THE INVALUABLE INVISIBLE: SUBTEXT, SUPER-OBJECTIVES, THEME

Themes are a way to connect with the audience on a deeper level and often provide the “take-away” at the end of the movie: catharsis, fulfillment, indignation, and a host of other emotions. We will discuss theme and how it threads through a narrative. We will also discuss what is between the lines – the unspoken elements that give stories narrative heft and gravitas.

In Class: Review and discuss assigned reading in terms of thematic content

Reading assignments for Week 6:

TEXT: Story pp 89-99
Save The Cat! Goes to the Movies
Reading for Week 7: Horror and comedy scripts

WEEK 6 – ROLE OF GENRE & TARGET AUDIENCE

We will explore the variety of genres and the important part they play in targeting the right project for the right buyer and the right audience. The differences between studio and indie mandates: studio, streaming, cable and network needs. The rollercoaster of audience and buyer interest in different genres.

In Class: Discuss how movies could work in a different genre. Break into groups and come up with different narrative scenarios.
Reading Assignments for Week 7:

TEXT: FINISH  *Save The Cat! Goes to the Movies*
*The Kinetic Log-Line by Bill Broyles*
SCREENPLAYS:
Review Sample Coverage

**WEEK 7: COVERAGE FOR FILM AND I.P.  Doing the log-line and synopsis**

Topics to cover: Where material comes from (SCOUTING). Novels, Graphic Novels, Podcasts, plays, documentaries, Webisodes, Original Content, etc.

What is coverage, what’s it used for, who uses it, why it’s so important.

How to do coverage: coverage template; the art of the log-line; what to think about before you start writing your synopsis and your comments. Break down log-lines using “The Kinetic Log-Line.” How to distill the script’s most important beats into a one-page synopsis.

**In Class:** Review Coverage Samples provided. Students will do log-lines for films and TV shows

**Assignment for Week 8:**

Students to write coverage for assigned film script. MUST BE SUBMITTED IN THE GOOGLE DRIVE 48 HOURS before WEEK 9 class day. ALL STUDENTS MUST READ ALL COVERAGE.

**WEEK 8: COVERAGE FOR TV AND OTHER MEDIA**

Discuss differences between assessing Film and TV projects, documentaries, novels, plays, podcasts, etc.

**In Class:**

Review Student Coverage – is it accurate? Effective? Does it meet the needs of the Executive? Based on this coverage, what story notes should be presented to the writer?

Students will do role playing to discuss scripts with their “bosses.”

**Assignment for Week 9:**

Students write coverage assigned TV script. MUST BE SUBMITTED IN THE GOOGLE DRIVE 48 HOURS before WEEK 9. ALL STUDENTS MUST READ ALL COVERAGE.

**WEEK 9: ASSESSING SCRIPTS – MAKING YOUR COMMENTS COUNT**

What to keep in mind when doing when doing comments. The main points to cover, the art of constructive criticism, taking a stand, being articulate about your POV. Discuss the art of pitching.

Guest Speaker: Manager or Agent to discuss importance of coverage to business of packaging.
WEEK 10: STORY NOTES

How to write and give notes. How to work with writers: when to check in, how to help, how to nudge, what to sweat, when to let it go. Writing is rewriting.

Guest Speaker: TV Writer

In Class: Discuss Student Coverage – is it accurate? Effective? Does it meet the needs of the Executive? Students “pitch” their conclusions to their bosses.

WEEK 11: STORY DEVELOPMENT

Discuss the process of development for film and TV and streaming – how they are similar and different; who is involved as the project goes through different stages; how you can avoid pitfalls.

In Class: Continue role playing to deliver comments on scripts.

Speaker: Producer to discuss current development on his/her projects.

Discuss scripts to pick for final assignment. You will have a choice between a feature script or a TV pilot.

Your final assignment should be seen as an expansion of your coverage assignments. Using an industry template, it should include a log-line; a one page synopsis of the script you have chosen, and comments that provide a detailed overview of the script’s strengths and weaknesses, in terms of act structure and plotting, genre and tone, characterization, and thematic intent. For TV there should be an assessment of whether the characters and idea can sustain over time. The genre commentary should explore how closely the script follows its genre characteristics – see Save the Cat Goes to the Movies – whether it mixes various genres, and how it distinguishes itself from other scripts in the genre. The characterization commentary should focus on believability, character complexity and growth, and the charisma and identification factors: why we want to spend two hours/numerous episodes with this character (or characters)? Or, conversely, in the case of unlikable characters – why would we even want to spend ten minutes with them. The act structure is about how well the turning points and main story events are executed. Is there a hook or surprises? What is the inciting incident? What are the obstacles? And finally: there is thematic intent. All scripts, even the most escapist, mindless, and formulaic, are about something. The great screenplays grapple with themes that concern us all. What themes drive your script of choice?

After your thorough and complete analysis, work up a set of notes for the writer that provides a CLEAR PATH FORWARD for the next draft, applying all you have learned in the class. This is an expansion of the “Comments” section you would normally do for coverage and are more geared toward development notes.

WEEK 12

Group One splits up into those giving and receiving comments.

WEEK 13
Group Two splits up into those giving and receiving comments.

WEEK 14

INDUSTRY SPEAKER – where this new skill-set can take you and how to break in.

Course Materials

Required Reading

- *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* – Chris Vogler
- Selections from *The 21st Century Screenplay* – Linda Aronson
- Selections from *Story* – Robert McKee
- *Elements of Style* – Strunk and White
- *Save The Cat! Goes to the Movies: The Screenwriter’s Guide to Every Story Ever Told* – Blake Snyder
- Assigned scripts from the BLACKLIST
- Assigned produced scripts/pilots that will cover a range of genres including drama, comedy and romcoms, horror, sci-fi and thrillers.

Recommended Reading

- *Story* – Robert McKee (strongly recommended)
- *Hero With a Thousand Faces* – Joseph Campbell

NOTE: Students are expected to read the assigned texts and screenplay in full and be able to discuss in a meaningful way during class sessions. Please plan your schedule accordingly.

HANDOUTS

Samples of Professional Coverage from CAA, Sony, ICM, A24

Resources

- Access your course materials: [NYU Classes](nyu.edu/its/classes)
- Databases, journal articles, and more: [Bobst Library](library.nyu.edu)
- Assistance with strengthening your writing: [NYU Writing Center](nyu.mywconline.com)
- Obtain 24/7 technology assistance: [IT Help Desk](nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)

Course Policies

Attendance and Tardiness

Study abroad at Global Academic Centres is an academically intensive and immersive
experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centres is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades. The class roster will be marked at the beginning of class and anyone who arrives after this time will be considered absent. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence.

For courses that meet once a week, one unexcused absence will be penalised by a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. For courses that meet two or more times a week, the same penalty will apply to two unexcused absences. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

**Religious Observance**

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Academic Programs Coordinator in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

**Academic Honesty/Plagiarism**

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU LA. NYU LA policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

It is a serious academic offense to use the work of others (written, printed or in any other form) without acknowledgement. Cases of plagiarism are not dealt with by your instructor. They are referred to the Director, who will determine the appropriate penalty (up to and including failure in the course as a whole) taking into account the codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges.

**Inclusion, Diversity, Belonging and Equity**

NYU is committed to building a culture that respects and embraces diversity, inclusion, and equity, believing that these values – in all their facets – are, as President Andrew Hamilton has said, “...not only important to cherish for their own sake, but because they are also vital for advancing knowledge, sparking innovation, and creating sustainable communities.” At NYU LA, we are committed to creating a learning environment that:

- fosters intellectual inquiry, research, and artistic practices that respectfully and rigorously take account of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences; and
promotes an inclusive community in which diversity is valued and every member feels they have a rightful place, is welcome and respected, and is supported in their endeavours.

Provisions to Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Centre for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

STORY TEMPLATES – Journey of the Hero (The Hero with a Thousand Faces)

Breakdown of THE MONOMYTH

SEPARATION  (the venturing out from common day)
Ordinary World
Call to Adventure
Refusal of the Call
Supernatural Aid
Crossing the Threshold
The Belly of the Whale

INITIATION  (the battle with fabulous forces)
The Road of Trials
Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as Temptress, Atonement with the Father
Apotheosis
The Ultimate Boon

RETURN
Refusal of the Return
The Magic Flight
Rescue from Without
THE TRAGIC TEMPLATE

1. Anticipation Stage
2. Dream Stage
3. Frustration Stage
4. Nightmare Stage
5. Destruction or Death wish Stage

SAVE THE CAT

The Blake Snyder Beat Sheet

1. Opening image
2. Theme stated
3. Set-Up
4. Catalyst
5. Debate
6. Break into Two
7. B Story
8. Fun and Games
9. Midpoint
10. Bad Guys Close In
11. All is Lost
12. Dark Night of the Soul
13. Break Into Three
14. Finale
15. Final Image

3 ACTS ORGANIZED AS 8 SEQUENTIAL UNITS

Adapted from the Story Lab
For this specific purpose, we define a sequential unit as a self-contained portion of the entire story, usually about 10 to 15 minutes (pages) in length. With a clear beginning, middle, and end, each sequence has its own short-term tension (not the main tension, but related in some way) along with a central conflict that gives shape to the entire 10-15 minutes.

This Sequence Outline is NOT an absolute formula or perfect recipe to building a feature script, but it is something to work from, because each script is a prototype: new, unique, custom made just for its own story.

NOTE: I will use the terms hero and protagonist—they are one in the same: your main character.

**ACT I**

The SET UP. By the end of the first act you’re going to be introduced to all the major players of the story, the themes, the location, the scope, the visual image system, the conflicts, and especially the main conflict.

NOTE: In the first act – your hero will have revealed their fatal flaw.

**SEQUENCE ONE — Status Quo (Ordinary World for Campbell devotees) through Inciting Incident.**

Establishes the central character (protagonist), her/his life, and the status quo and the world of the story.

In first minutes of film, audience must know the genre. If it’s a horror film, in your first minutes you must have a scene that will instill fright. If it’s a comedy, you must have a scene (or joke) depicting the brand of humor you will present consistently throughout film — is it dark comedy or a broad romantic comedy— the tone and character details need to support your intentions.

Page 3 (around) there will be a line of dialogue or action that depicts theme, i.e.: "what your film is about." This will introduce your screenplay’s “Central Question”.

Sequence One typically ends with the INCITING INCIDENT, but this plot point can sometimes appear earlier in the first few minutes of the film if you don’t need a lengthy set-up. Jaws begins with an inciting incident because you do not need to set up a sharp attack. It is what it is. It is this attack that sets the external dramatic action (goal) in motion: catch/kill the shark.

The inciting incident unleashes your hero’s desire (WANT – conscious and unconscious) and she or he MUST REACT to the inciting incident (which is why it’s good to put in the PRESENT (not the past/backstory.)

The inciting incident SETS THE STORY IN MOTION and MUST BE DEALT WITH AT THE CLIMAX.

**SEQUENCE TWO — Predicament & Lock In**
Sets up the predicament that will be central to the story, with first intimations of possible obstacles. The main tension will be established at the end of the act. At the end of this sequence, there will be an event that FORCES YOUR HERO TO TAKE ACTION, MAKE A CHOICE — your hero is now LOCKED IN the predicament propelling her/him into a new direction to obtain her/his goal. In hero's journey terms, this is a crossing the first threshold.

The Lock In is the turning point into Act II. It occurs 25% into your screenplay.

Your B-story will typically be first introduced in Sequence Two. Sometimes it may come as early as Sequence One, other times it may be delayed until Act II. Your B-story (subplot) will often deal with character growth, so it's often some kind of relationship. Love interest/friendship/family — and is often referred to as the "relationship line".

Your story's THEME often comes through via the B-story. (NOTE: you can have more than one subplot, and if you do you must pay careful attention to how they inform the A-storyline and when they come in, and how you pace them.)

Sequence Two continues with expository information/scenes: the necessary information/back story required to follow/anchor your narrative.

By the end of act I — we have set up character, goals and stakes.

ACT II

Note: ACT II is made up of obstacles and opportunities—all in service to your protagonist (even the reluctant ones) going after a GOAL that stems from the DESIRE/conflict released in the inciting incident.

Act II is where you derive your Major Dramatic Question (aka Central Question). This question is plot-driven and can be answered with a yes or no. e.g. Will Police Chief Brody capture the killer shark? (Jaws) Will Billy Elliot be admitted to the Royal Ballet Company? (Billy Elliot).

SEQUENCE THREE — First Obstacle & Raising the Stakes

• Pages 25/30-45. Your hero is confronted with first OBSTACLE, and the beginning of the elimination of the alternatives begins. Since our character is locked into the situation and can't simply walk away, the stakes are higher — there is a lot more to lose.

In this early part of Act II, your hero is doing everything she/he can to avoid change. (NOTE: When we react in an old way to a new event, you get conflict. We are forced to react in a new way, and until we do, we have conflict. Closing this sequence — beginning around page 40 is a scene chronicling your protagonist's FIRST WIN and/or SIGNS of GROWTH.)

SEQUENCE FOUR — ENDS with First Culmination/Midpoint – 50% into your screenplay.

Pages 45-60: You can now see some changes in the behavior of your protagonist. This sequence has your hero in a less reactionary mode. She/he is now facing obstacles and opportunities (real and false opportunities) as you follow the principle of RISING ACTION.
**MIDPOINT**: The midpoint is the point in the movie the character has gone as far as they can go without changing. The hero in the first half of Act II (seq 3 and 4) is working to accomplish a goal in a certain way. At the midpoint, something happens. Not some subtle thing, something we can easily put our finger on. That thing changes hero's journey. A different goal, or a different direction or method to attain original goal.

The rising action builds to the First Culmination (midpoint), which usually parallels the RESOLUTION of the film. This is referred to as the "Midpoint Mirror". If the story is a tragedy and our hero dies, then the first culmination (or midpoint) should be a scene or sequence with a *false win/victory that leads to a loss*. This loss (obstacle) will force your protagonist (hero) to seek her/his goal through other means. Take a new approach/direction. If, however, your hero wins/succeeds in the end of the film, then sequence four should end with him winning in some way: Basically this win comes in the form of an opportunity that sets the quest in another direction.

In Hero's Journey terms—there's a pivotal change that will set in motion your Hero’s transformation. The hero recommitts to her/his (SMART) Goal at the midpoint.

An example of a classic midpoint event/scene that divides, changes and heightens is the midpoint in *The Eternal Sunshine Of the Spotless Mind* when Joel realizes he wants to keep his memories of Clem.

**SEQUENCE FIVE — Subplot & Rising Action**

Act II can lose momentum at this point if we don't have a strong SUBPLOT to take the ball for a while. We still want RISING ACTION, but we're not ready for the main culmination (climax) yet. This is the sequence where your subplot takes center stage. You have been weaving the B-story in since sequence 2 or sequence 3 but now it goes from backseat to front and center.

**SEQUENCE SIX — All Hope is Lost/Deep Secret revealed/Miracle**

Ask yourself—what is your protagonist literally or figuratively willing to die for? Your protagonist is now using all she/he has learned during their journey and the stakes grow higher at an accelerated pace.

Without the ALL HOPE IS LOST moment, there would be no personal stakes. We need to generate tension with audience to keep them engaged.

We're building up to the climax (in next sequence) —so here, in sequence six, you are back to the main storyline with a vengeance. The primary purpose of this sequence — our hero is as far away from her/his goal as she/he can get —the low point of your script is where your hero has just about run out of options. Her/his goal no longer seems attainable. Notice the words 'just about' and 'seems.' This is the key. Nothing is finished, but it must appear that way. In the B-story, your hero is furthest away from mending the key relationship that facilitates character transformation.

The All Hope Is Lost moment typically builds in a series of scenes. The "shit hits the fan" at the beginning of the sequence and builds. Most often, within this series of scenes, your protagonist reveals a deep secret that will shed light on main conflict, and then, typically, a MIRACLE HAPPENS —this miracle —gives your hero the thing she/he has needed all along to be
successful. The miracle propels you and is typically your turning point into ACT III. This occurs 75% into your screenplay.

NOTE: Since most midpoints and endings are paralleled, this turning point at the end of Act II is typically at a polar opposite, meaning 180 degrees away from your resolution. So if your hero wins at the midpoint and at the end of the film, then this is the lowest point. And if the ending is a tragic one, there will be some kind of false win/victory here.

NOTE: Throughout Act II your hero has been changing, learning, and developing. This is her/his CHARACTER ARC. And that change begins to manifest in Act III. The fatal flaw that has been holding your hero back comes to the forefront.

ACT III

Simply put, your hero learns the lessons in Act II, but in Act III she/he must now apply that knowledge, and the person she/he was in the beginning is clearly not the same person now. The scenes in this sequence are usually shorter, the pace is faster with no elaborate set ups.

Up to this point, your hero has been tested, tried everything, but only has one way left, propelling him/her head on into a new confrontation with the inevitable.

SEQUENCE SEVEN — ends with the CLIMAX (main culmination)

This sequence begins with a new set of complications which escalates the tension and stakes. This sequence is the bulk of Act III. It introduces a NEW TENSION and (most often) a PLOT TWIST.

CLIMAX: final conflict/obstacle. Your hero is faced with having to give up everything she/he has left behind in pursuit of her/his goal. This puts your hero in a crisis point where all she/he has is put in jeopardy of being lost. It comes down to the final moment — all or nothing. And because of the hero’s final action — she/he wins or loses and is changed.

At the climax, your Hero will prove they have addressed their flaw (or not, in the case of some, though not all tragedies).

The stakes have gone through the roof in sequence seven. You are in your A-story—with your protagonist doing everything in their power to reach that GOAL—until she/he reaches the —

Final confrontation, the CLIMAX. The main conflict comes to its culmination. Wants and needs collide. The unconscious need illustrates main theme of story.

The climax of your movie comes at the 90% mark.

A plot TWIST can end this sequence or come at the start of the eighth sequence.

NOTE: A twist (or reversal) is a surprising, yet explainable and motivated change in the direction of the action — either within a scene, a sequence, or in the overall story line.

SEQUENCE EIGHT — Denouement/Resolution
Final scenes of the narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are resolved. Clarity is important. **The end is transformation of your hero.**

Sequence 8 will most often be shorter than the others—you really don’t need another 15 minutes of screen time to wrap things up. Your A and B stories are resolved. (Your subplots may have been resolved earlier.)

Further notes: the REAL structure of any good story is simply circular — a descent into the unknown and eventual return.

As I’ve talked about in class, classic three-act structure has guidelines (rules) but it’s paramount that you understand that guidance is a form of support – not a mandate. The very worst thing you can do as writers is take your inspiration and dilute it with a paint-by-numbers approach.

**If your goal is to have a commercially viable screenplay, you must bring craft to your talent.** And breaking down your 3-acts into 8 sequences is just one of many ways you can write a feature-length screenplay.

Know that for a 110-page screenplay (a good page count to aim for) – your Act I will most likely be around 25 pages, Act II around 60 pages and Act III also around 25 pages. But know those numbers can vary, depending on genre and how long a resolution you need.

**THINGS TO CONSIDER**

1. What kind of world? What genre? How is the world introduced?

2. Who is the protagonist?

3. What is the inciting incident/call to adventure? (The Hockey Player’s son giving him the finger.) Does it result from a blunder? (His response – the mission statement gets him fired). Does it open up another world? (Yes, fewer clients.)

4. Do the inciting incident and call to adventure take place at different points? Is there a refusal of the call? (Yes, when he tries to stop delivery of the mission statement)

5. What is the character’s story purpose? (To start his own firm.) Is there any element of “the impossible dream?” (Yes/No)

6. Is there a character split (Jekyll/Hyde)? (Yes, Jerry the idealist vs. Jerry the liar.) Is the character’s “divided self” reconciled at the end of the film?

7. Is there a “meeting cute” scene (where the lovers meet)? (The airport.)

8. Is there a “life line,” impact character, mentor figure? (Yes, Rod).

9. Is there a “signature line?” (Yes, “Show me the money!”)

10. Is there a “dirty little secret?” (No)

11. Is there a point of no return?
12. What is the climax?

13. What’s at stake?

14. What is the premise? (Jerry Maguire is dissatisfied with his life.)

**DYNAMICS**

1. When does the hope and fear dynamic truly kick in? Does it pertain to solving the problem or the love story?

**SCENE WORK**

1. Expository scenes or moments.

2. Plants, payoffs, elements of advertising

3. Ally to antagonist

4. Turning points

5. Aftermath scenes

6. Backstory or defining moments

7. POV moments

8. Reversals

9. Belly of the Whale moments

10. Dramatic irony

11. Plot twists

12. Show stopping scenes

**OTHER STORY TEMPLATES**

The Arthurian cycle and the Grail knights: Arthur (the king; hero of the epic), Gawain (the hero of romance; the courtly knight, Lancelot (the flawed but otherwise perfect knight; hero of action), Mordred (the bastard son, the mocker), Percival (later Galahad; the holy fool, whose innocence and virtue make him the perfect Grail knight)

Cinderella/Ugly Duckling – *Muriel’s Wedding*

Beauty and the Beast – *Silence of the Lambs*

Faust – *Quiz Show*
Jack and the Beanstalk – *Being John Malkovich*
Sleeping Beauty – *Thelma and Louise*
David vs. Goliath – *The Verdict*