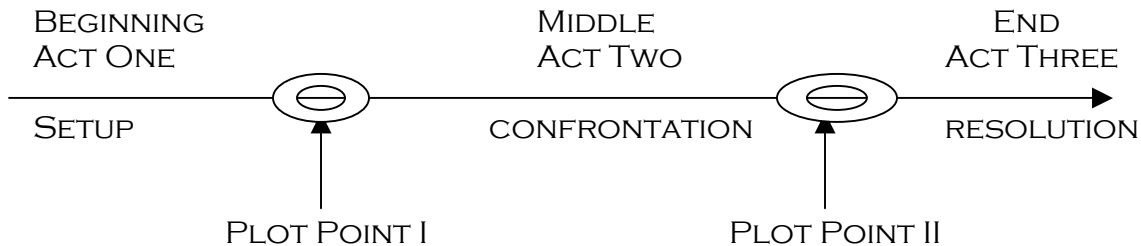


WHAT IS A FILM SCRIPT?

IT IS NOT A NOVEL OR A PLAY. A FILM SCRIPT IS A THE BLUEPRINT FOR THE VISUAL TELLING OF A STORY. IT IS ABOUT AN INDIVIDUAL OR A GROUP IN A PLACE DOING THEIR THING. IT IS A STORY TOLD WITH PICTURES.

A FILM SCRIPT IS A LINEAR STRUCTURE THAT IS MADE UP OF MANY PARTS: ACTION, CHARACTERS, MUSIC, VISUAL IMAGERY ETC. ALL OF THE PARTS MAKE UP THE WHOLE. A FILM SCRIPT IS DIVIDED INTO THREE PARTS:

**ACT ONE**

THE THREE UNITIES OF DRAMATIC ACTION: TIME, PLACE AND ACTION. EACH HAS TO BE DEFINED IN ACT ONE. THE GENERAL RULE OF THUMB, ONE PAGE OF SCRIPT EQUALS ONE MINUTE OF SCREEN TIME. IN THIS SECTION YOU ESTABLISH THE DRAMATIC CONTEXT KNOWN AS THE SET UP. CONTEXT IS THE SPACE THAT HOLDS THE STORY IN PLACE, MUCH LIKE A GLASS HOLDS IT'S WATER. IN A FULL LENGTH SCRIPT, THE AUTHOR HAS APPROXIMATELY 30 PAGES TO SET UP: THE STORY, THE CHARACTERS, THE DRAMATIC PREMISE, THE SITUATION(CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE ACTION) AND ESTABLISH THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MAIN CHARACTER AND THE REST OF THE WORLD HE LIVES IN. THE FIRST 10 MINUTES IS CRITICAL. IF YOU DON'T HAVE THE AUDIENCE BY THEN, YOU PROBABLY WON'T GET THEM.

FOR YOUR FILM, YOU HAVE LESS TIME TO DO THE SAME THING. YOUR FILMS ARE TO BE 15-20 MINUTES IN LENGTH, SO YOU HAVE 2-3 PAGES TO COMPLETE THE SET UP. YOU HAVE TO CAPTURE THE AUDIENCE IN THE FIRST THREE MINUTES. FOCUS ON ESTABLISHING THE MAIN CHARACTER, THE DRAMATIC PREMISE AND THE DRAMATIC SITUATION.

ACT TWO

THIS SECTION COMPRISES APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THE SCRIPT LENGTH. THAT WOULD BE ABOUT 60 PAGES. IT IS HELD TOGETHER WITH A DRAMATIC CONTEXT OF CONFRONTATION. DURING THIS ACT, THE MAIN CHARACTER ENCOUNTERS OBSTACLE AFTER OBSTACLE AFTER OBSTACLE THAT KEEPS HIM OR HER FROM ACHIEVING THEIR DRAMATIC NEED. WHAT IS DRAMATIC NEED?

DRAMATIC NEED: WHAT THE MAIN CHARACTER WANTS TO WIN, GAIN, GET OR ACHIEVE DURING THE SCREENPLAY.

WHAT DRIVES THE CHARACTER FORWARD THROUGH THE ACTION? WHAT DOES HE OR SHE WANT? WHAT ARE HIS OR HER NEEDS? YOU MUST KNOW THE DRAMATIC NEED SO THAT YOU CAN CREATE OBSTACLES, WHICH CREATES CONFRONTATION. CONFLICT IS THE NAME OF THE GAME!!

IN TERMS OF YOUR SCRIPTS, ACT II SHOULD BE 10-15 PAGES IN LENGTH.

ACT THREE

THE RESOLUTION...*IT DOES NOT MEAN AN ENDING*. RESOLUTION IN A SCREENPLAY IS A SOLUTION TO THE CONFLICT THAT ALLOWS THE MAIN CHARACTER TO ACHIEVE THEIR NEED (HAPPY ENDING) OR FAIL (SAD ENDING). THE RESOLUTION SOLVES THE CONFLICT. THE ENDING IS THAT SPECIFIC SCENE, SHOT OR SEQUENCE THAT ENDS THE SCRIPT; IT IS NOT THE SOLUTION TO THE STORY.

THE ACT III OF YOUR SCRIPT SHOULD BE 3-5 PAGES IN LENGTH, DEPENDING ON THE ANTICIPATED LENGTH OF YOUR FILM.

WHAT ARE PLOT POINTS?

A PLOT POINT IS ANY INCIDENT, EPISODE, OR EVENT THAT "HOOKS" INTO THE ACTION AND SPINS IT AROUND INTO ANOTHER DIRECTION. IT IS DESIGNED TO KEEP THE AUDIENCE ENGAGED IN THE STORY. THERE IS ONE AT THE END OF ACT I AND AT THE END OF ACT II.

THIS PARADIGM WORKS FOR ALL FILMS. TRY IT OUT. TAKE A FILM YOU KNOW WELL AND SEE IF YOU CAN'T APPLY THIS FORM TO THAT STORY. IT WORKS!

WHERE DO YOU START?

IN ORDER FOR YOU TO TELL THE STORY, YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHO YOU ARE WRITING ABOUT, WHAT DO THEY WANT AND WHERE ARE THEY GOING TO END UP. YOU NEED AS CLEAR A VISION OF THE ENDING AS YOU DO OF THE BEGINNING. HOW MANY FILMS HAVE YOU WATCHED THAT WERE VERY GOOD FOR THE FIRST 90 MINUTES AND THEN THE FILM FALLS APART IN THE END? IT IS AS IF THE CREATIVE TEAM HAS NO IDEA OF HOW TO "GET OFF THE STAGE".

YOU START WITH A STORY MAP.

- A. THE PROTAGONIST.
- B. THE PROTAGONIST'S EXTERNAL GOAL .(PLOT/ACTION/OBJECTIVE GOAL)
- C. THE PROTAGONIST'S INTERNAL GOAL.
(CHARACTER/EMOTIONAL/SUBJECTIVE GOAL)
- D. THE THEME (MAIN CONTROLLING THEME) WHAT IS THE STORY ABOUT?
- E. THE MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT.(WHAT KEEPS THE PROTAGONIST FROM THE GOAL? THE ANTAGONIST...THE MAJOR PROBLEM...ETC.
- F. THE ENDING. (CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION). MUST BE THEMATICALLY CONSISTANT.

G. CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION. (OVERRIDING MYSTERY TO BE ANSWERED BY THE END)

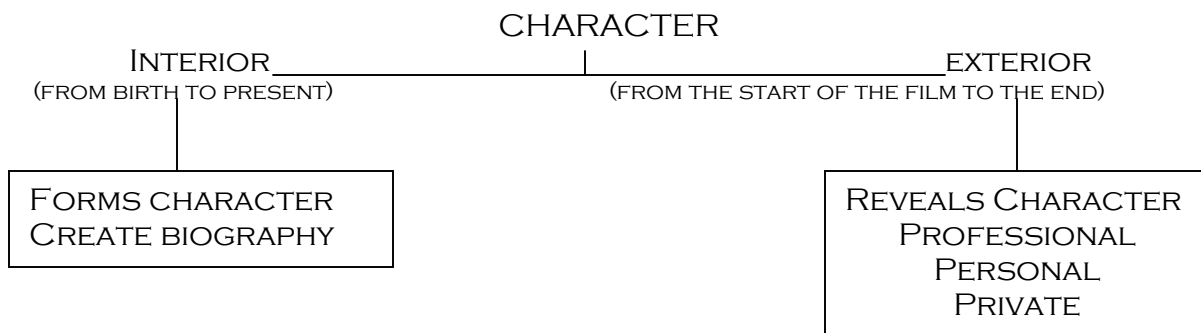
ADD TO THIS THEN THESE EIGHT QUESTIONS TO GET A FULL STORY MAP.

- 1) OPENING.
- 2) INCITING INCIDENT.
- 3) GALVANIZING MOMENT
- 4) PLOT POINT #1
- 5) MID POINT
- 6) PLOT POINT #2
- 7) CLIMAX
- 8) EPILOGUE (OPTIONAL)

WITH A COMPLETE STORY MAP, YOU ARE READY TO BEGIN WRITING YOUR SCRIPT.

DEVELOPING CHARACTERS

YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THE CHARACTERS YOU ARE WRITING BEFORE YOU ACTUALLY BEGIN TO WRITE. START WITH THE PROTAGONIST. THEY ARE THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE FILM. KEEP IN MIND THAT ALL CHARACTERS EXISTED BEFORE AND IN MOST CASES WILL EXIST AFTER THE FILM. YOU ARE ALLOWING THE AUDIENCE TO GET A GLIMPSE OF THEIR LIVES AT A SPECIFIC POINT AND TIME. LOOK AT THIS DIAGRAM:



GIVE EACH CHARACTER A POINT OF VIEW. BE SPECIFIC WITH THE BEHAVIORS FOR THE CHARACTERS. THE MORE SPECIFIC YOU ARE, THE MORE SPECIFIC THE STORY WILL BE TOLD. REMEMBER THAT FILM IS A VISUAL TELLING OF THE STORY AND YOU MUST FIND WAYS TO VISUALLY REVEAL THE CHARACTER TO THE AUDIENCE. AVOID TWO DIMENSIONAL CHARACTERS...THEY ROB THE STORY TELLING OF THE RICHNESS OF THEIR CHARACTERS. REVEAL THE CHARACTERS THROUGH ACTION. *ACTION=CHARACTER*. USE ACTION WORDS TO HELP DEVELOP CHARACTERS. FOR EXAMPLE: NEED, POINT-OF-VIEW, ATTITUDE, PERSONALITY, BEHAVIORS, ETC.

ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS ARE INEXPLICITLY TIED TOGETHER LIKE YIN AND YANG. THEY CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT EACH OTHER. IN LIFE, ENDINGS ARE

ALSO BEGINNINGS. SO IT IS WITH FILM. YOU NEED TO CREATE THE MOMENTUM FOR THE LIFE THAT WILL EXIST AFTER THE FILM IS OVER. START YOUR FILM WITH ACTION. OR REVEAL SOMETHING THAT THE AUDIENCE NEEDS TO KNOW TO UNDERSTAND THE STORY. REMEMBER THAT IT IS A VISUAL TELLING OF A STORY. CONNECT THE TWO ENDS OF THE FILM. WHAT IS THE END OF THE STORY? HOW IS IT RESOLVED? GOOD FILMS ARE ALWAYS RESOLVED. THERE NEEDS TO BE A CLEAR-CUT ENDING. DO THE CHARACTERS GET WHAT THEY WANT? DO THEY GET AWAY? ARE THEY CAUGHT? TODAY'S AUDIENCE DEMANDS A SPECIFIC ENDING.

THE RESOLUTION MUST BE CLEAR IN YOUR MIND BEFORE YOU WRITE THE BEGINNING. IT IS A CONTEXT, IT HOLDS THE END IN PLACE. BY THE END OF THE FILM, EVERYTHING NEEDS TO BE DRAMATICALLY RESOLVED IN TERMS OF CHARACTER AND ACTION. ALL QUESTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN RAISED NEED TO BE ANSWERED. THE STORY IS COMPLETE. ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS ARE TWO SIDES TO THE SAME COIN. ONE CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT THE OTHER. CHOOSE EACH CAREFULLY.

CONNECTING THE OPENING AND THE BEGINNING IS A NICE TOUCH. IF THE OPENING SHOT IS SET IN A PARK, ENDING THE FILM IN A SIMILAR OUTSIDE SCENE IS AN EFFECTIVE TOUCH. IT "BOOKENDS" THE FILM. SINCE YOU KNOW THE ENDING OF THE FILM, PERHAPS CREATING AN EVENT OR INCIDENT THAT LEADS TO THE END OF THE FILM. YOU CAN USE AN ATTENTION-GRABBER IF THAT IS AN APPROPRIATE CHOICE FOR THE FILM. (I.E. THE OPENING OF *STAR WARS*.) PERHAPS AN INTERESTING CHARACTER INTRODUCTION. SOMETHING THAT STANDS OUT ABOUT THE CHARACTER.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE WAS THE MASTER AT OPENING. LOOK AT THE BEGINNING OF *MACBETH*, WITH THE THREE WITCHES AND THE GREETINGS FOR *MACBETH*. OR THE GHOST OF *HAMLET'S* FATHER. TRY TO CREATE THAT "HOOK" THAT WILL PULL IN THE AUDIENCE AND KEEP THEM INVOLVED.

CHOOSE YOUR OPENING WELL. IT IS CRUCIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE FILM.

FILM SCRIPT STRUCTURE

THE STRUCTURE OF A FILM SCRIPT IS COMPOSED OF THREE COMPONENTS:

- SHOT- EACH TIME THE CAMERA IS TRIGGERED UNTIL IT IS STOPPED, THAT IS A SHOT. THE LENGTH DOES NOT MATTER. A MOVIE IS COMPOSED OF HUNDREDS OF SHOTS.
- SCENE- A COLLECTIONS OF SHOTS THAT ARE RELATED BY SUBJECT. SCENES ARE OFTEN ESTABLISHED BY LOCATION OR TIME.
- SEQUENCE- A SERIES OF SCENES THAT ARE RELATED BY THEMATIC STRUCTURE, A SINGLE IDEA. FOR EXAMPLE, THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO A SHIFT IN THE FILM. IT IS A UNIT, A BLOCK OF DRAMATIC ACTION UNIFIED BY THAT IDEA.