

Writing for Screen

Film Script- What is it?

- A film script is a text which represents a story which is told through moving images, sound, time, character/ action.
- A film script is a text which instructs different people (actors, directors, directors of photography, sound technicians, scenic artists, editors).
- It is important to remember that the script or screenplay is a functional document in a collaborative enterprise.

What Film Scripts Contain

- Sluglines (time, setting, place)
- Description (action)
- Characters (who is involved in the scene)
- Dialogue
- Instructions to characters

- More so than other forms of creative writing, screenplays tend to follow a recognisable 3-act structure.
- This structure has set proportions, with the second act being about twice as long as both the first and the third act.
- Almost any commercial film you have seen follows this structure, often down to the minute.

Basic Structure and Proportions of Screenplay

- *The example assumes a 120 min film.*

Beginning

Middle

End

• **Act I** - **Act II** - **Act III**

• *Setup* *Confrontation* *Resolution*

• Minute 1-30

31-90

91-120

- Act 1 up provides the "Setup".

Often the Film starts with what is sometimes called an "inciting image".

- This is an image, short scene or episode, right at the beginning of the film, which sets up the intention, mood or tone of the film.

Thus many action films open on a short, kinetic action sequence (e.g. James Bond), while a character-driven melodrama about a custody battle may start with a moody shot of a derelict school playground.

- The First Ten pages demonstrate the opening situation and establish the dramatic premise -- what is the film going to be about? They also establish the protagonist- who is at the centre of the film? whose story is being told?
- Demonstration typically means action not dialogue (dialogue can often be too slow, clumsy, and dull). There can be dialogue but it needs to be integrated into action. A large part of the exposition will be visual, hence dialogue should serve characterisation and plot development (i.e. forward movement rather than explanation about what happened in the past).
- After the initial demonstration, characters and the subject can be more carefully explored but action will remain the primary vehicle through which character is explored. Action does not mean that people need to shoot guns at each other, but they need to do things, i.e. go to places, make decisions, interact with their environment.

- Act I as a whole establishes the protagonist and their situation, including their dramatic need.
- Usually, Act 1 ends with a decision made by the protagonist which crystallises this need and moves forward the plot.
- If the dramatic need can be fulfilled right away, there is no conflict. Act 2 is about the complications of achieving the dramatic need. These complications come in the form of conflict.

- A dramatic need may be as simple as:
 - the protagonist needs/wants to go home (but a boulder has trapped their arm and they can't move)
 - the protagonist wants to tell someone they love them and be loved in turn (but they are too shy to do so, and the love-object already has a partner)
- Each dramatic need requires an element of conflict

- There are many types of conflict, internal and external:
conflict with...

...nature / the environment / Technology
(e.g. struggling for survival on a mountainside; trying to escape an exploding starship)

...Another Person / people
(e.g. a romantic rival; a corporation causing pollution; a political system as embodied by a particular person)

- ...the supernatural / metaphysical
- (e.g. a vengeful ghost; a religious commandment)

... the self
(e.g. crippling shyness; a prejudice; a health condition; a character flaw)

- Conflict leads to confrontation leads to resolution. Together they produce plot.
- It is often better to think in terms of situations: i.e. opening constellations and problems. Which is another way of saying, you need to understand the specifics of your protagonist's dramatic need.
- It is the specifics of a situation that make it interesting rather than the general pattern. Writing is as much about the small ideas as about the big concepts.

Storyboard

- “The storyboard is the way to visualise the entire movie in advance”
Martin Scorsese

Storyboard Steps

- Step 1: Identify key scenes in script
- Step 2: Map out the key scenes
- Step 3: Sketch
- Step 4: Describe what happens in each frame

Writing your films

- Remember your parameters (3 mins, St Monica's, wide/mid/close ups only)
- "The Wait"
- Choose a genre
- Stick to what you know
- Consider your suspension of disbelief
- Target Audience = you guys!!