



Story Structure Checklist

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Euroscript Story Structure Checklist

THE BASICS

Film Title:

Genre:

Central character's name:

Rough age:

Poor/middle/rich:

Expertise of the movie:

Intriguing relationship in the film:

How does this relationship change as my character moves through his/her character arc?

Character's Goal:

Arc:

Wound/Flaw:

What's the wound/ flaw which has prevented my character from achieving this arc before the beginning of this story?

Hook:

What is the film's hook? Describe the front titles sequence. Why does this sequence grab my audience by the throat?

Goal:

What's my character's goal?

Inciting Incident and plot

What's the inciting incident which is going to kick-start the story and how is this going to be shown in a dramatic way on screen?

How does the inciting incident set up my character's problem?

What's my character's plan to overcome that problem?

What goes wrong?

What's my character's new problem?

What's my character's plan to overcome that problem?

What goes wrong?

(Brainstorm a list of 10 things to go wrong.)

How does my character's plan change as s/he's confronted with each obstacle? How do the choices my character makes at each new obstacle reveal more and more deeply who s/he is both to her/himself and to the audience?

How does each step in this process refer back into my character's arc?

SEQUENCING

If I were to tell this story in 11 or 12 10pp sequences, each with their own beginning, middle and end, how would each sequence escalate the problems my character confronts pushing him/her deeper and deeper into his/her character arc?

PAGE BY PAGE

The first ten pages

Things to set up in the first ten pages:

- ◆ Central character before journey into arc:
- ◆ Character's world (community/workplace):
- ◆ Character's friends and family:
- ◆ Character's planet/universe:
- ◆ How do my character's appearance, speech patterns and relationships reflect him/her at the beginning of his/her arc:

About page 20 set up the inciting incident.

At the mid-point at about page 60, what happens in the scene during which my character realises 'there's no turning back' on his/her character arc?

By about page 75, what's the list of things that have gone wrong so that my character is feeling as hopeless, miserable as I can possibly make him/her? The death scene, do I need one?

At the beginning of Act 3, what final, incredible plan does my character make not only to save himself or herself, but, now, to save the community, the world, in fact the entire universe?

- ◆ What's the amazing climactic sequence at the end of the film?
- ◆ What's my character's reward for achieving his/her character arc?
- ◆ Does s/he get the girl/guy?

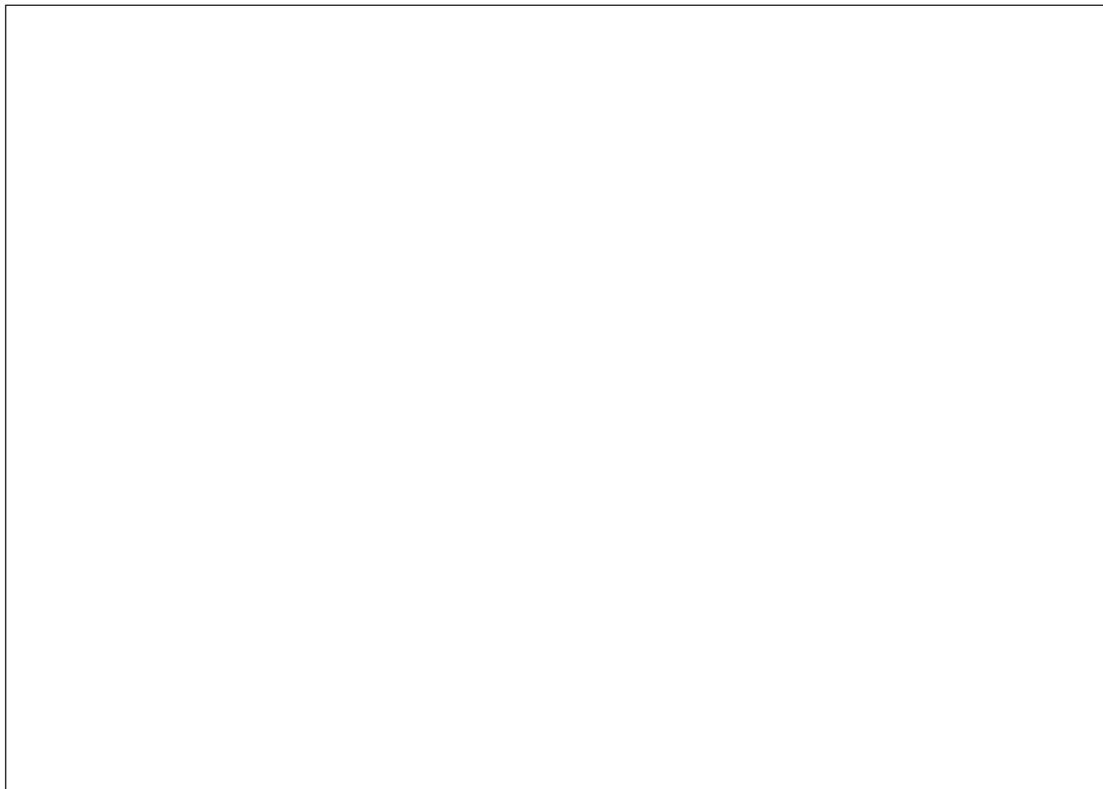
- ♦ Find peace at last?
- ♦ Die, but in death expose the greater truth/save the planet?

What happens in the 'breathing space' end credits sequence?

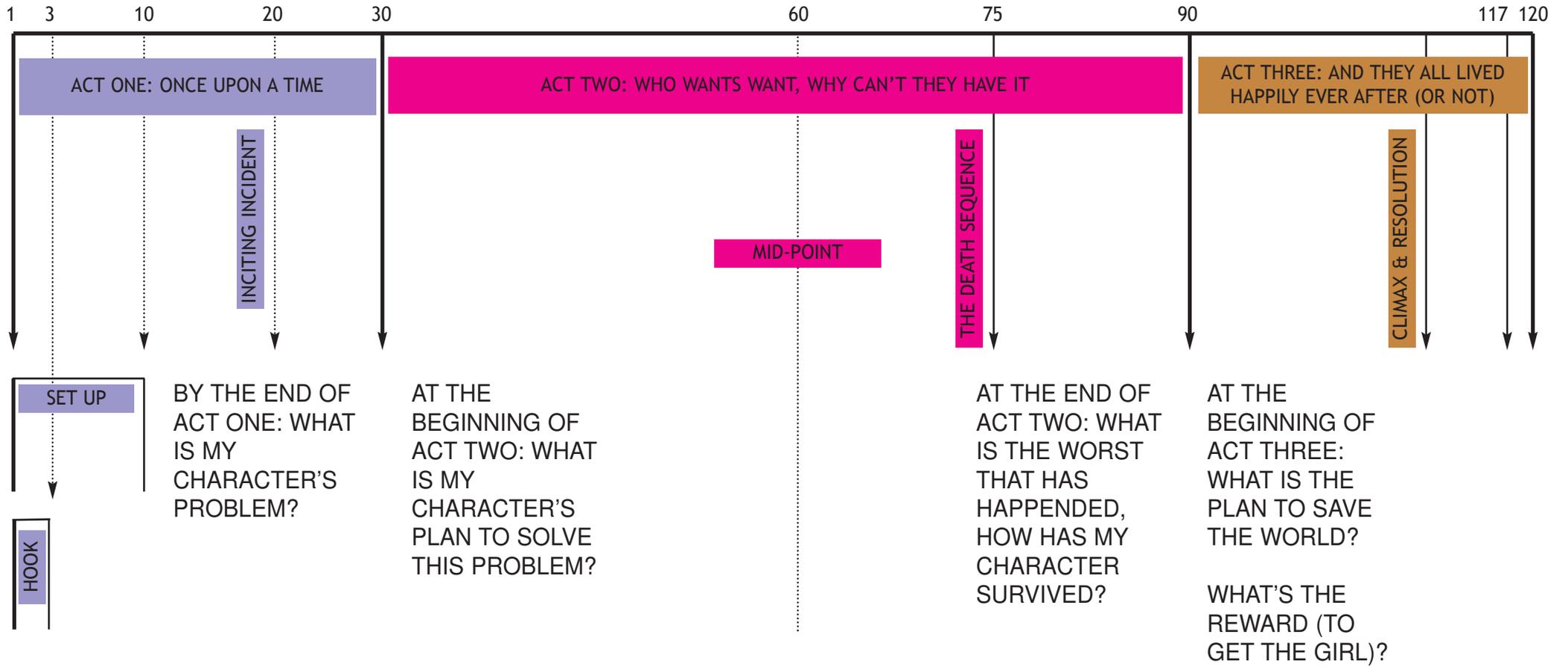
What's the point of my film? What does it say about the world in which we live? What's the premise?

My film described in three short sentences:

The Poster for my film (taken from the most memorable moment in the film:

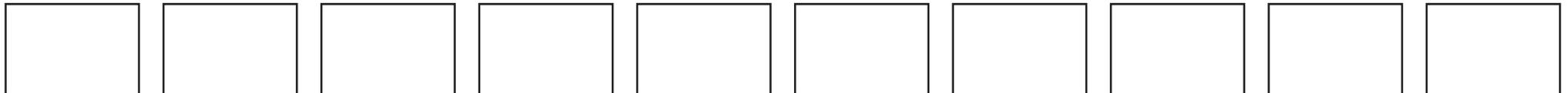


EUROSCRIPT SCREENPLAY STRUCTURE



CHARACTER ARC: _____
 GOAL: _____
 SUBPLOTS: _____

12 X 10 PAGE SEQUENCES EACH WITH ITS OWN THREE ACT STRUCTURE



GOALS

- ♦ TO WIN A COMPETITION (Little Miss Sunshine, Rocky, Strictly Ballroom)
- ♦ TO DISCOVER THE TRUTH (All thrillers, detective movies, Erin Brockovich, Silkwood)
- ♦ TO GET THE GIRL OR THE GUY (every romantic comedy you've ever seen)
- ♦ TO ESCAPE (From confinement, prison; also Thelma and Louise and most road movies, escaping in an 'inner' as well as the 'outer' way)
- ♦ TO GET BACK HOME (101 Dalmations, Apollo 13)
- ♦ TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE
- ♦ TO RIGHT A WRONG
- ♦ TO RESTORE BALANCE/ HARMONY
- ♦ TO FIND WHAT'S LOST
- ♦ TO RETURN/ PAY BACK WHAT'S OWED
- ♦ TO TAKE REVENGE
- ♦ TO SAVE THE GROUP, GET THE GROUP TO SAFETY (all disaster movies including spoofs like Airplane)
- ♦ TO DESTROY THE ENEMY, GET THE ENEMY OUT OF YOUR LIFE (War films, gangster films; many sci-fi movies, Jaws, The Exorcist)
- ♦ Or make up a goal, but it must be extremely specific not woolly and generalised. For example in Juno: to find a parent for my child.

CHARACTER ARCS

CHARACTER ARCS - going up

- ♦ To go from feeling dead inside to feeling alive inside
- ♦ To find the courage to come out of your shell and join the human race
- ♦ To find the courage to stand up to a bully/ a bullying organisation
- ♦ To overcome the fear of rejection and find the courage to fall in love
- ♦ To (re)connect with your ideals/ better self/ true heart

CHARACTER ARCS - going down

- ♦ To realise life is complex, difficult, not fair (A Simple Plan)
- ♦ HOW DOES THE CHARACTER TRAVEL ON A LINE FROM UP TO DOWN, OR DOWN TO UP?
- ♦ HOW DOES THE CHARACTER'S APPEARANCE CHANGE TO SHOW THE AUDIENCE THAT THEY ARE CHANGING INSIDE?
- ♦ HOW DO THEIR SPEECH PATTERNS CHANGE?
- ♦ HOW DOES THEIR CIRCLE OF FRIENDS CHANGE?

Endings:

Upbeat

Downbeat

Downbeat with an upbeat message - even though my central character died, at least the

How to Write a Great Treatment

I am always being asked, 'How do you write a great treatment?' There are no rules, but if you're really stuck here's a checklist I've built up over the years while trying to help writers pitch their work.

This list is taken from a piece I've written to help writers who want to enter the Euroscript Screen Competition so it focuses on treatments which are two pages in length. If yours is longer or shorter, the same rules will probably apply. Use them or abuse them at your convenience...

CHARACTER

- ♦ Is there a clear central character? (Or, if it's an ensemble piece, is it clear which characters form part of the 'ensemble' and which are just the supporting act?)
- ♦ Is the central character on screen at least 80 per cent of the time? Is s/he introduced in the first sentences?
- ♦ Crucially, what's interesting about them? Why do we want to watch them for two hours on screen?
- ♦ Is your central character active not passive? Does s/he drive the action, responding to each obstacle by making choices which, in turn, drives him/her to formulate new goals (rather than react passively to plot points making them feel like a bit of a victim?)
- ♦ Is it clear which side of the tracks your character comes from? What's his/her outlook on life? What's his/her hang up?
- ♦ How has the character changed by the end of the story? Perhaps, more precisely, how has his/her 'emotional state' changed? This list is by no means definitive, more things to think about, but by the end of the film how have the following changed?
- ♦ his/her beliefs, values
- ♦ his/her attitude to life
- ♦ his/her knowledge, insight or wisdom

As film is a visual medium how are these interior changes expressed using images, for example what changes do we see in:

- ♦ his/her clothes and appearance
- ♦ his/her circle of friends and acquaintances
- ♦ his/her home, level of tidiness for example
- ♦ his/job
- ♦ his/her speech patterns

Are there three or four big beats, or turning points, which take your central character to a new emotional place? If fewer - is there enough going on? If more - is your story coherent?

How are these played out on screen? What makes these scenes visually extraordinary while at the same time being emotionally powerful?

CENTRAL RELATIONSHIP

Is there a fascinating relationship at the heart of the story? What does the relationship look like at the beginning of the film? As the central character changes, how does this relationship change? What happens to this relationship by the end of the film? Which two or three big, visual scenes illustrate how this relationship is changing?

PLOT

- ♦ Does the plot of your story hang on the Central Character's 'journey' or 'character arc'?

- ◆ Does the central character have a clear, specific goal? What obstacles does he/she face in trying to pursue this goal? Obstacles can be expressed both in terms of inner blocks, flaws or wounds as well as external obstacles (family, community, the environment, aliens from outer space).
- ◆ Do these obstacles escalate, in difficulty and dramatic impact?
- ◆ Which are the four or five great plot twists which keep the audience gasping?

VISUAL STYLE

Have you made clear that this is a feature film? It will be filmed using expensive cameras and lenses, will be shown in a massive cinema on a vast screen and cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to make. Does it have an extraordinary visual style? Are the locations epic? Stylistic? What will the colour palette and the cinematic style be? (Think, for inspiration, of the visual styles of 'Amelie', 'Milk' and 'The Baader Meinhof Complex', for example).

GENRE

Is the genre you have chosen used consistently throughout? Is it clearly comedy or horror? Sci-fi or musical? Make sure you haven't mixed genres unless you really know what you're doing. We don't want to discourage fresh, original ideas that may depend on a striking combination (Sci-Fi Musical, anyone?). However we do want to discourage treatments which aren't consistent in their genre choice.

PREMISE and POINT

Is your premise clear? By the end of the film have we learned something that's fresh and original about the world in which we live and what it means to be human? What's the point of your story? Don't leave your audience wondering.

EXPERTISE

In some films, a specific 'expertise' turns a potentially dull story into 'The Wrestler'. Does your film show us a 'world' of expertise? How will the specialised knowledge of this world bring added pleasure to the audience? Films like The Bodyguard, Chocolate, Babette's Feast, Strictly Ballroom, are all brought to life by their 'expertise'. (Obviously, this isn't mandatory). (And obviously you need to be the world's expert on your chosen 'expertise' so you don't get mowed down by a gang of outraged train-spotters once your movie is released).

BEATING OUT YOUR PLOT

Are you writing out the story, beat by beat, so it's clear how the plot develops through the film? For example:

- ◆ by half-way down page one, do we know a) who the central character is; b) what kind of world he/she is living in; what plot twist is hurtling him/her into the story?
- ◆ by the end of page one, has the character dug him/herself into a terrifying hole - either emotional, physical or, preferably, both? Is the world conspiring against him/her? What's the plan to make the comeback?
- ◆ by half way down page two are we reaching a terrifying, horrifying climax where the character may die, or at the very least, lose everything?
- ◆ what's the big twist at the end, which comes from deep within the central character, that will give us the satisfying ending?

Obviously some films are 'quieter', more nuanced, and don't rely on a plot that 'hurtles' but just make sure we're being told the whole story and nothing but the story, from beginning, through the middle, to the end.

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

They may be secondary but they also need (smaller) goals and arcs. Even cameo appearances need to come into the scene for their own strong reason (I'm the LIFTBOY and my job is to get this passenger to the top floor, politely, because maybe some day he'll notice me and promote me). If you're thin on plot, tell the story from the point-of-view of three or four of your secondary characters - you'll soon find new plot ideas emerging.

TITLE

Is there a great title, probably no longer than about five words, that sums up the theme or the central character? Often this is his/her name or his/her goal/predicament (Revolutionary Road, The Reader, Dead Man Walking, Rocky, Slumdog Millionaire, The Wrestler). Long wordy titles with complicated place-names and/or double-entendres which rely on the audience having a degree in Semiotics to understand their meaning are a bit offputting.

WRITING STYLE

Is your writing style in the treatment reflecting the film you want to make? If it's a screwball comedy does your prose reflect this by making us laugh? If it's a horror, are we too terrified to read to the end?

AUDIENCE

Are you totally, one hundred per cent positive your local cinema will want to show this film to people handing over £8 or more for the privilege (and that's not counting the cost of the popcorn).

CUT THE WASTE

Is everything in your story crucial? Can you cut or merge a few dozen of those ancillary characters? Do you really need those round-the-world locations? That army of ten thousand horsemen? Is every word of your treatment working hard to tell us your story?

AND FINALLY...

Now forget every word I've just written, tear up the rulebook, stick two fingers up to the so-called gurus who think they can teach you how to write and tell the story that's bursting to come out of you in the way that reflects who you truly are.