



MASTER THE REWRITE
STRUCTURE GUIDE

by Script Society



STRUCTURING YOUR SCREENPLAY

Your characters are **solid**. Your dialogue is **excellent**. Your story is **incredible**. Yet, you can't shake the feeling that your screenplay just isn't coming across right. It's time to take a look at the structure.

THE SHORT VERSION

Structure is the backbone of any screenplay, without it, your script is bound to suffer. When scenes and story arcs are properly structured they will be more impactful and focused, which will cause your script to be stronger and more effective in its message.

THE LONG VERSION

The structure of your screenplay is essentially a blue print. Just like a builder doesn't start construction until the blue print is done, a screenwriter shouldn't start writing until they've properly structured their story.

The most traditional way to structure a feature screenplay (which we will focus on in this guide) is by using the 3-Act Structure. Within each of those Acts are key beats that the film needs to hit. Once that is established, the scenes in between will gain a greater sense of focus.

This process forces the writer to ensure that every scene is driven, focused and relevant to the plot or character development. This will lead to the creation of a screenplay that is motivated and constantly progressing toward the climax.

HOW TO FIX IT

It's easier than you think. At Script Society, we use a simple and straightforward method to ensure all our screenplays have flawless structure. Today, we are sharing that method with you!

All you have to do is follow this guide.



LENGTH GUIDELINES:

Before we get started, it's important to know how these acts should break up your screenplay once written.

FEATURE SCREENPLAY LENGTH:

ACT ONE: 25 – 30 pages

ACT TWO: 55 – 60 pages

ACT THREE: 25 – 30 pages

TOTAL: 110 – 120 pages

Note: Generally the principal is that the second act should take up 50% of the film, with the first and third act taking up 25% each. That way, this can be applied to short screenplays as well.

1 HR TELEPLAY LENGTH:

TEASER: 2 – 5 pages

ACT ONE: 10 – 15 pages

ACT TWO: 10 – 15 pages

ACT THREE: 8 – 12 pages

ACT FOUR: 8 – 12 pages

TOTAL: 45 – 60 pages

Note: Some shows actually have an Act Five as well. If this is the case, stick to the lower end of the spectrum for page numbers.



30 MIN SITCOM LENGTH:

COLD OPEN: 1 – 3 pages

ACT ONE: 8 – 10 pages

ACT TWO: 8 – 10 pages

TOTAL: 20 – 24 pages

ACT BREAKDOWN FOR FILM & TV:

Time to get to work! Before you can start structuring your screenplay effectively, it's important to know what *should* happen in each of those Acts. That way you will go into writing your own screenplay with a better understanding of how to build a story effectively.

FEATURE LENGTH SCREENPLAY

ACT ONE: Introduce the protagonist and show us what is “normal” and how that is all about to change.

ACT TWO: The protagonist begins their journey, overcoming obstacles along the way.

ACT THREE: The protagonist closes in on their goal, reaching the climactic moment where either they succeed or fail.

1 HR TELEPLAY

TEASER: A short opening to tease the conflict the episode will tackle. It should grab the viewer's attention and make them want to know what happens next!

ACT ONE: Introduce the current story and characters at hand.

ACT TWO: Our leading characters are confronted with the conflict we saw in the Teaser! They start to figure out how to overcome it.



ACT THREE: Our leading characters are losing and the bad guys are winning. The situation looks hopeless.

ACT FOUR: Our leading characters find a solution, fight back, leading up to the climax where they win or lose.

Note: All Acts should end on a cliffhanger. If you have a Fifth Act, you can view that as a resolution to the episode that leads into the next. Otherwise, that can happen quickly at the end of Act Four.

30 MIN SITCOM

COLD OPEN: A short, comedic, opening to the episode that illustrates the main conflict.

ACT ONE: Introduce the leading characters and the conflict as they begin to navigate around it in a comedic way.

ACT TWO: Our leading characters figure out a solution to the conflict and solve it!

Note: The cliffhangers at the end of acts in sitcoms don't need to be as intense as those in 1hr long teleplays. They should be more comedic and punchy, which will cause the viewer to want to stay for more jokes!



THE STRUCTURE GUIDE:

It's the moment you've been waiting for. Are you ready? All you have to do to properly structure your screenplay is to hit all these key plot points, making sure that scenes around them are either leading up to them, or reeling from the aftermath of them.

ACT ONE

Sequence 1: The Setup (page 1 – 10)

In the first ten pages of your script you want to focus on introducing your protagonist (and maybe antagonist!) and showing us what is “normal” in their lives. We need to see why we should like or not like this person.

Sequence 2: The Catalyst (page 12-15 approx.)

The Catalyst (or inciting incident) is the event that will change the course of the story. Something must happen to our protagonist that will set the main conflict in motion.

Sequence 3: The Debate (page 15 – 20)

The debate beat follows up on the action of the catalyst by forcing the story to pause. This is the moment where our protagonist must doubt themselves or their journey.

Sequence 4: First Act Turning Point (page 15 – 25)

Our protagonist is left with a choice. Either they can continue life as usual, or they can embark on a quest. Since this is a film (and not real life), they will choose the latter. Leading into...

ACT TWO

Sequence 4: Exile/New World (page 25 – 35)

Everything has changed for the life of our protagonist now. For the first bit of Act Two, we want to explore how things have changed and how our Protagonist is dealing with it. Are they happy, mad, upset...etc.? What does this new world (so to speak) look like?



Sequence 5: Trials (page 35 – 55)

Once that is established, we are going to move back to the mission at hand. This section is a little tricky as the stakes are still relatively low, but the story still needs to move forward. Our protagonist will formulate a plan and begin to execute it. At this point in the story, there will not be too many obstacles for our Protagonist to face. Blake Snyder (author of “Save the Cat” – go buy this book now!), calls this part the “Fun and Games” in his book and provides a piece of advice that we find invaluable (page 81 of his book):

“It’s where most of the trailer moments of a movie are found.”

Picture the trailer to your movie and put those scenes here! It may sound silly, but it’s helped us in this rather tricky section.

Sequence 6: Midpoint/Point of No Return (page 55 – 65)

The midpoint is a major turning point of any screenplay. A dramatic event needs to happen here that will change the course of the plot. In many cases, the protagonist views the midpoint as the end, only to realize they are far from it. This means that typically the protagonist will experience a major loss or victory here that will shape the rest of the film.

Sequence 7: Higher Stakes & Complications (page 65 – 75)

The aftermath of the midpoint will lead to higher stakes and a faster pace. The chase is on now. The protagonist must complete their goal before it’s too late. The bad guys are closing in. The time to pause and think things over is fading fast. This mad scrambles leads into...

Sequence 8: All Is Lost (page 75 – 85)

At this point of the story, the protagonist loses something or someone dear. It causes the entire journey to stop, as the protagonist falls into a downward spiral. They doubt themselves and their mission. The future looks impossible...

Sequence 9: Second Act Turn (page 85 - 90)

Until they come up with a new solution that can save the day! The protagonist recovers, ready to fight again.



ACT THREE

Sequence 10: Final Push (page 90 – 100)

In a final push, the Protagonist gathers all the information they need to complete their goal, leading into...

Sequence 11: Climax (page 100 – 110)

...the climactic moment where they confront the antagonist and either win or lose.

Sequence 12: Resolution (page 110 - ?)

The resolution that follows should document the aftermath of what happened in the climax. We put a question mark up there because the length of this section can vary from 1 – 10 pages. Most screenwriters wrap up the story in about 5.

AND THAT'S HOW IT IS DONE.

These beats and sequences can be applied to TV as well. They would remain in the same order, but divided between the Acts and condensed to fit the content. You may find that some sequences aren't necessary in TV, and that's fine too. This is simply a guideline to help you get started.