

## FILM AND VIDEO STUDIES

# Writing a Screenplay

## # 1 TELL A GOOD STORY

a **good story** can be easily be repeated or retold

has a **main character** ('hooks' the audience)  
good story can be easily be repeated or retold

has **clear themes** ('hooks' the audience)

framework has the 4 Ps:

**protagonist**

**(dramatic) problem**

**plot**

**premise**

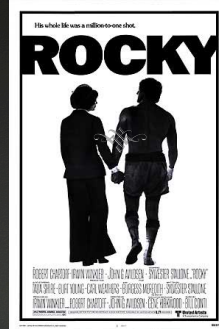
what is a premise?  
the fundamental idea  
that drives the plot  
(e.g. angry shark  
terrorizes beach)

## # 2 USE A POPULAR THEME

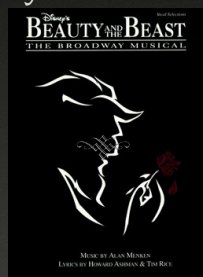
choose something that people can relate to or are  
familiar with

then add a twist

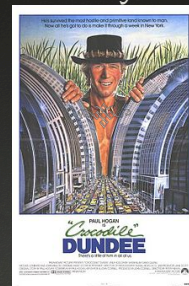
## Rags to Riches

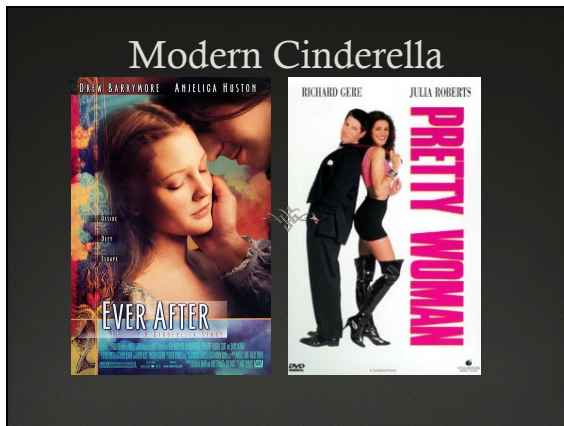


## Beauty and the Beast



## Jungle Boy Goes to the Big City



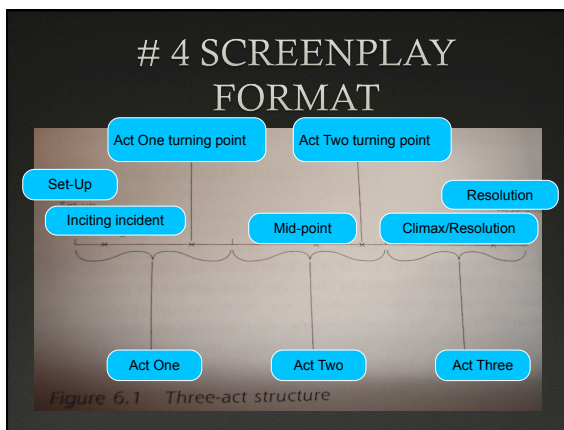


## # 3 USE THE THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

**Act One**  
establishes a **protagonist** and a **world**

**Act Two**  
problem leads to further **conflict, complication and struggle**

**Act Three**  
**protagonist** must be seen to change by the end of the story a **world**



## # 4 SCREENPLAY FORMAT

**The Set-Up**

situates character within settings and location that help to ground your premise

## Three Kings (opening scene)

FADE IN:

EXT. IRAQI DESERT - DAY

WIDE ANGLE POV of wide open desert, flat grey sky.

THE CAMERA is running forward, toward a big sand berm in the distance. There are 0.5. sounds: SOLDIER'S EQUIPMENT CLANKING, BOOTS RUNNING ON SAND. Hear a MAN'S BREATHING.

The back of his helmeted head and his uniformed shoulders APPEAR in the BOTTOM of the FRAME, running. This is TROY BARLOW, Sergeant, U.S. Army, 25 years old. On his helmet is a photo-button with a photo of a newborn baby.

Suddenly, on the sand berm 100 meters ahead, an IRAQI SOLDIER stands. Troy stops in his tracks, out of breath, and stares at the figure on the berm. The Iraqi flutters a white flag over his head, then puts it down and picks up a gun. Troy turns around, we see his face for the first time.

TROY  
Are we shooting people, or what?

## # 4 SCREENPLAY FORMAT

**The Inciting Incident**

this scene identifies the first event of excitement/anguish which **motivates the protagonist** and **hooks the audience**

CR INT. STUDY, INDY'S HOUSE 22

CR Brody enters the book-lined, dark-wooded study. He paces for a moment before the fire which is dying in the fireplace, then spots something and goes over to Indy's big desk. The surface is covered with open books, monographs, maps and drawings--all about the Ark of the Covenant.

CR Brody smiles; he knows his friend very well. Indy comes closing the door behind him. Brody turns to him with a triumphant expression.

CR BRODY

CR They want you to go for it. And

CR they'll pay.

## # 4 SCREENPLAY FORMAT

**Act One Turning Point**

this is the point of no return - after this action/event the protagonist's world will never be the same again

Ferris Bueller's Day Off

CR INT. GARAGE 84

CR The door opens slowly, dramatically as we hear a heraldic fanfare. Light streams in to reveal Cameron and Ferris looking at the car. Ferris is smiling with excitement and awe. Cameron is frowning with trepidation and fear.

CR CU. FERRARI STALLION

CR The prancing black stallion. We move up from the stallion to the erotic red hood of a 1958 Ferrari 250 GTS California.

CR CAMERON AND FERRIS

## # 4 SCREENPLAY FORMAT

**The Mid-point**

this is the lowest point of the protagonist's journey - the point where they are most down on their luck

the first half moves the protagonist to the depths of danger, second half forces him/her to take control of the situation

**example?**

## # 4 SCREENPLAY FORMAT

**Act Two Turning Point**

the protagonist struggles to overcome all the odds and to crawl out of the pit of despair

this moment will direct the protagonist on a rapid path towards the action of the climax

CR SODA SHOP. DUSK. Pleasantville

CR David heads toward work with his apron and little paper hat.

CR The BUDDY HOLLY music has given way to "hip" '50s JAZZ. DAVE BRUBECK drifts out of the soda shop as David pauses for a moment, takes a bite of his oatmeal cookie, and heads inside.

CR SODA SHOP.

CR The place has "morphed" even more. If it was a teenage hangout before, it has become almost a Bohemian coffee house now. Brubeck's "TAKE FIVE" plays in the background while several patrons talk "intensely" in their booths.

CR DOORWAY.



## # 4 SCREENPLAY FORMAT

### The Climax

this is the finale - should have lots of impact

brings all the strands of the story into play - protagonist forced to deal with problem - climax will prove author's premise

example?

## # 4 SCREENPLAY FORMAT

### The Resolution

describes the few minutes of screen time that take place after the final climax

may give some clues as to the protagonist's future direction

example?

## Script Conventions

title in uppercase

location, setting info

camera shots in upper case

```
"THE SHINING."  
EXT. COLORADO MOUNTAIN (U.S.A.) - DAY - L.S.  
Lake and Mountains. CAMERA TRACKS FORWARD past island in lake.  
  
DISSOLVE TO:  
  
EXT. ROAD - DAY - L.S.  
High Angle V.W. Car moving along road - CAMERA TILTS UP with it.
```

## Script Conventions

character instructions in uppercase

dialogue - character names in uppercase

```
INT. OVERLOOK HOTEL/LOBBY - DAY - M.L.S.  
Jack walks L-R across Lobby. CAMERA TRACKS BACK & PANS with him to RECEPTIONIST behind desk.  
  
JACK  
Hi, I've got an appointment with Mr. Ullman. My name is Jack Torrance.  
  
RECEPTIONIST  
His office is the first door on the left.  
  
JACK  
Thank you.  
  
JACK moves away R-L. CAMERA PANS with him and TRACKS IN after him through Secretary's office to open door of ULLMAN's office - revealing ULLMAN seated at desk with SECRETARY standing beside him.
```