

McKee Story Structure

1. THE WORLD OF THE STORY

- a. **Definition of “Story”:** A series of events that fit together in such a way as to teach a Value; the primary way human beings apprehend reality.
- b. **Tell it Well:** Literary talent is not enough -- you must be able to tell a story. It's a seller's market for those who can. \$250 million spent on development in 1988. 17 to 1 odds against a developed script getting made.
- c. **All Stories Are Essentially the Same: the Quest**

2. Stories That Don't Work and Why

- i. “Slice of life”/personal dramas: Boring and under-structured.
- ii. “Sure-fire Commercial Hit”: The hero unwittingly finds the object that will end the world. Car chases, explosions, etc. Over-structured. *James Bond*.
- iii. Between these polar extremes of fact (sensory experiences; slice of life) and abstraction (imagination and action) lies the story worth telling.

b. Creating the World

- i. The “A” Words: *Author*: If the author knows something the audience doesn't know, his writing has... *Authority*: We believe what he says and his world becomes... *Authentic*: We willingly suspend our disbelief.
- ii. Background: Respect your audience, stay true to conventions and pay attention to detail. You should be an expert on the following:
 - (1) Politics; power arrangements
 - (2) Organizations and rituals
 - (3) Morals and values
 - (4) Genres and conventions
 - (5) Back Story: the key events of the character's lives from their histories that will impinge on the screen story.
- c. Quote: “Writer's block is the result of having nothing to say, which is a result of insufficient research.”

3. SUCCESSFUL PLOTS

a. Plot Types

- i. Classical Plot: Closed ending (all questions are answered); external conflict; single protagonist; continuous time frame. *Verdict, Terminator, Raiders*

- ii. Non-Plot or Minimalistic: Open ending (unanswered questions remain; emotional residue); internal conflict; multi-protagonists; passive protagonist; broken time frame. *Tender Mercies, Paris, Texas, Radio Days, My Dinner with Andre.*
- iii. Anti-Plot: Exactly reversing the Classical Plot; turning it on it's head. *After Hours, Holy Grail, Track 29*, films by Roeg and Bunuel.
- iv. Table

Plot Type:	Classical	Non-Plot	Anti-Plot
Philosophy:	life makes sense	existentialism	life is absurd
Ending:	closed	open	either
Conflict:	external	internal	either
Protagonist:	single/active	multiple/passive	either
Time:	continuous	broken	broken
Event Cause:	causality	coincidence	coincidence
Reality:	consistent	inconsistent	inconsistent

b. Finding Plots

- i. Limited Number: No matter how freshly sensational any current best-seller appears to be, a little sleuthing will prove that its plot is not an original product of its author's imagination but that it is a recombination of several sources that the writer has blended in his own unique way.

“Gozzi maintained that there can be but 36 tragic (dramatic) situations. Schiller took great pains to find more, but he was unable to find even so many as Gozzi.” – Goethe

“All American literature comes from one novel by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.” – Hemingway.

“We can say nothing but what has been said. Our poets steal from Homer, our story dressers do as much. He who comes last is commonly best.” – Robert Burton.

- ii. Examples

Hello, Dolly!, from *The Matchmaker* by Thornton Wilder, taken from his own *The Merchant of Yonkers*, based on an old German farce by Nestroy. The same clever, charming, fun-loving matchmaker, Mrs. Levi, stars in all of them!

Back to the Future is the latest time travel story. A Playboy short story *The Chronicle of the 656* (Byams) about a WWII battalion who find themselves in the middle of the Civil War. The C.O. must help defeat his beloved south to preserve the U.S. John Balderston's *Berkeley Square* (1929). 1889, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Mark Twain).

Shakespeare wrote the greatest plays of all time even though there wasn't an “original” plot among them!

iii. Sources for Plots

- (1) Newspapers: “Hug the Headlines”
- (2) Thinly Veiled True Stories: “Roman a Clef”: *Serpico, The French Connection, The Godfather, Citizen Kane, All the President's Men, Sugarland Express.*
- (3) Jokes: Look for universal values and a surprise punch line.
- (4) Quotations: Eternal truths here. Truman Capote's *Answered Prayers* is based on the quote “More tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones” – St. Theresa.
- (5) Irritations: What bugs you?
- (6) Values: What moral imperatives drive you? Each value has a contrasting value: Honesty vs. Dishonesty, Integrity vs. Lack Thereof, Sacrifice vs. Selfishness, Love vs. Hate, Generosity vs. Greed, Lust vs. Love, Excitement vs. Boredom, Clear Conscience vs. Guilt, Hope Vs. Despair, Idealism vs. Materialism.
- (7) Bible Stories: Advantages: Every human emotion portrayed, clearly defined values, triumph of good, no copyright problems. Ex: Who didn't catch the Christ-like imagery in E.T.?
- (8) Myth: Read Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth* and *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. The hero begins as a non-hero, living in ordinary surroundings. The catalyst sets the story in motion; the stakes are established; and the problem is introduced that demands a solution. In any journey, the hero usually receives help (dwarf, witch, wizard). The hero starts his transformation and brings to light the obstacles that he must surmount to reach his goal (climax Act I).
- (9) When the hero hits rock bottom (Crisis Decision, end of Act II), he has a “death experience” at a “black moment” leading to a type of emotional rebirth (second turning point), when the worst is confronted and the action now moves toward the exciting conclusion. The obstacles transform him in the process. This leads to Act III confrontation and escape scene.
- (10) Resolution, the hero returns to his mundane world, changed and resurrected into a new type of life.
- (11) Cinderella Plot: Exists in every culture. However, today, Cinderella must be active, not passive, as before. *Cinderella Liberty, My Fair Lady, Born Yesterday, Sound of Music, Oliver Twist.*
- (12) Faust Plot: “I'd sell my soul for...” *Damn Yankees, Rosemary's Baby.*
- (13) The Classics
 - (a) *Roxanne* from *Cyrano de Bergerac*
 - (b) *The Graduate* was taken from Euripede's *Hippolytus* (428 B.C.) King Theseus' son Hippolytus scorns Aphrodite the Love Goddess and worships

chaste Artemis instead. To punish him, Aphrodite inspires his stepmother Phaedra with overpowering lust for him. She vainly fights her impulses, goes on a starvation diet, and at the point of death confesses her love to her nurse who tells Hippolytus. His repudiation of Phaedra is so vicious that she hangs herself, leaving Theseus a note saying his son violated her. The King curses and exiles Hippolytus, who is killed before his father learns of his innocence.

- (c) *The Last Detail, Papillon, Alice in Wonderland, the Wizard of Oz, Sugarland Express, Fantastic Voyage, 2001, Star Trek* all base their plots on Homer's *The Odyssey*.
- (d) *Love Story, Thieves like Us, the Fantastiks, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?, Exodus, West Side Story* are all based on *Romeo and Juliet*.

iv. **Commercial Plots**

(1) Three Elements Necessary

- (a) Structure: The key to success. No great film is great without it.
- (b) Creativity: Is it fresh? Original? Different? Unique? Does it hook you?
- (c) Marketability: The public connects with the project some way--characters, story.

v. Find the Connection: Universal appeal

- (a) "Underdog Triumphs": *Rocky, Karate Kid*.
- (b) "Revenge": *Dirty Harry*.
- (c) "Triumph of the Human Spirit": *Places in the Heart, Color Purple*.
- (d) "Integrity": *a Man for All Seasons, Chariots of Fire*

vi. Specific age group: Ex: Coming of age stories: *Stand by Me, Risky Business*.

vii. Timing and Trends: *the China Syndrome* and *Three Mile Island*: coincidence?

viii. Make it Personal: Descriptive films tell it like it is: *Porky's, Animal House*.
Prescriptive films show us our ideals: Hero films: *Chariots of Fire, Man of La Mancha, Field of Dreams*.

ix. Make it Important: What's at Stake? The jeopardy to the Hero must be clear in order for us to care about him. Ex: Survival, safety and security, love and belonging, esteem and self respect, need to know and understand, self-actualization, aesthetic (*Amadeus*)

x. Raising the Stakes: Include more than one in a film, keep the goal out of reach of the hero.

xi. Curiosity: Because the story hooks and holds us, then pays off at the end. We are curious as to how it turns out. Do it by withholding facts from the audience.

xii. Surprise: We want to be surprised; to have our expectations reversed, again and

again and again.

- xiii. Cheap Surprise: Taking advantage of the vulnerability of the audience and instead of telling the story honestly and letting the gap between action and result provide the surprise, you “trick” them. Ex: A hand grabs the hero's shoulder, spinning him around -- it's his best friend. Use sparingly.
- xiv. Realism: We want a life-like experience; the rhythm of life; the contradictions of life. We go to the movies to experience emotions we would never want to experience in real life.
- c. **Plot Setting.** Definition: The setting is your world in terms of time; its duration and location in space and the level of social reality of the location. The setting sharply limits the story; the world becomes necessarily small and understandable. “Know your world as God knows this one.”
- d. **Genre:** A finite, tightly-conventioned world in which a story takes place.
 - i. Art films (Non-Plot and Anti-Plot)
 - ii. Comedy: Sub-Genres: Farce, Black Comedy
 - iii. Education plot: *Educating Rita*, *Pygmalion*
 - iv. Psycho drama: *Psycho*
 - v. Crime story: *Dirty Harry*
 - vi. Social drama: *Mississippi Burning*
 - vii. Maturation plot (Coming of Age)
 - viii. Action/adventure: *Indiana Jones*
 - ix. Domestic Drama: *Ordinary People*
 - x. Mystery or Detective: Two kinds:
 - (1) “Open” or “Whodunits”: Multiple suspects. The hero determines who committed the crime. The audience knows only what the hero knows.
 - (2) “Closed” or “Columbo-style”: Multiple clues. The hero finds the flaw in the criminal's crime, exposing him. The audience knows less than the hero. Little empathy for the main character because he doesn't appear to be in jeopardy. *Agatha Christie's...*
 - xi. Historical (War): *Platoon*
 - xii. Political drama: *All the President's Men*
 - xiii. Love story: *Murphy's Romance*
 - xiv. Sci-fi: *Star Wars*
 - xv. Suspense: The audience, curious about the outcome, moves along at the same speed as the hero. Empathy is built for the hero because he's in jeopardy. *Alien*. Contrast with Mystery.

- xvi. Musical: *Paint Your Wagon*
- xvii. Fantasy: *Willow*
- xviii. Pseudo-Documentary: *Spinal Tap*
- xix. Western: *High Noon, Winchester '73*

e. **Conventions:** What can and cannot happen. Must be rigorously adhered to.

Ex: Genre: comedy. Convention: nobody gets hurt. Exception: black comedy sub-genre. Convention: people do get hurt and the audience feels the pain: *Prizzi's Honor*.

The Western: Relativism in values killed the Western, which is an allegorical drama of good and Evil. *Butch Cassidy* is not a classical Western. In it, the characters are modern, with contemporary concerns.

f. **Controlling Idea or Theme**

i. Def: What the film is about. You should be able to say it in a complete sentence: "This film is about _____." Ex: "Crime does not pay." Usually, the idea pay-off is found in the climax.

ii. Proving it: Stories are primarily an emotional experience. The writer wishes to prove his idea to the audience.

iii. Compare Structure: Structure is the demonstration of the idea to the audience.

iv. Climax: Expresses the controlling idea; the conversion of the idea to action.

v. Compare Premise: Premise is the beginning of the idea which launches the film. Often phrased as a question: "What would happen if...?" ("...a shark eats a swimmer?" *Jaws*)

vi. Idea: At the heart of every fine film is an idea, but just one. Wrap the idea in an emotion and imbed it in the climax of the film.

vii. Counter-Idea: Each idea has its counter-idea: Examples

(1) Idea: Crime doesn't pay. *Untouchables*

(2) Counter-Idea: Crime does pay. *Chinatown*

(3) Balancing the two: Structure the counter-idea to be stronger at first, so that when the idea triumphs, it is over huge odds and is thereby strengthened.

viii. Three Approaches

(1) Idealism: "Love triumphs"; "justice triumphs": *Jaws, Alien*

(2) Pessimism: "Hatred triumphs"; "evil triumphs"; "compulsive pursuit of worldly values will destroy you": *Wall Street, Straight Time, Citizen Kane, Star 80, the Rose, All That Jazz*

- (3) Neo-Idealism: (Academy Award winners) “Compulsive pursuit of worldly values will destroy you, but you can save yourself”: *Tootsie*, *Rainman*, *Electric Horseman*, *10*, *Deerhunter*, *Ordinary People*, *Baby Boom*, *Unmarried Woman*, *Kramer Vs. Kramer*, *Terms of Endearment*, *out of Africa*
- (4) Irony: The merging of positive and negative ideas: “Love is an exquisite pain that is incurable” (Woody Allen).
- g. **Deep Character vs. Characterization.** Characterization: The observable traits of a human being. Changeable in a moment, but deep character stays and requires the total effort of the writer. Deep Character: The moral or value-charged choices the person makes under pressure; who he is -- strong or weak, loving or hateful, etc. We know the truth about a character through attitude and action, rather than through philosophy and talk. Who a character is based on their choices made under pressure; not so much what he does but why he does it. The key to building empathy with the audience.
- h. **Character vs. Structure:** Structure and Character are two sides of the same coin; they are inseparable. Structure provides the pressure that forces the character to make the choices which reveal his deep character.
- i. **People Can Change:** It is a basic American belief that a person can change, as opposed to the European cynicism of Non-change. *Verdict*.
- j. **Writing Character.** Don't make it “actor proof”: Leave room for the actor to move. Instead, write text, layered with subtext. Love the characters you have created -- especially the bad ones.
- k. **Finding Characters:** Find characters in life and inside yourself. We are all multifaceted; draw upon your own personality and traits to find the traits that will surface in your character. Since we all feel the same in most situations, chances are your instincts about how a character would react to a certain situation will be correct.

4. THE PROTAGONIST

a. Three Important Questions

- i. What does the hero know at the start of the story?
- ii. What will he learn by the end of the story?
- iii. What will he be wrong about at the beginning?

b. Hallmark Qualities

- i. He is *willful*; the instigator of action;
- ii. He *consciously pursues a desire or goal*; This is the *spine* of the story. Three requirements:
 - (1) Something must be at *stake* that convinces the audience that a great deal will be lost if the hero doesn't obtain his goal.

- (2) The goal must come into *direct conflict* with the goals of the antagonist.
- (3) It must be sufficiently *difficult to achieve* so that the character must stretch and change will moving toward it; he'll be transformed at the journey's end.
- iii. He may also have an *unconscious desire* that usually conflicts with the conscious desire. When these desires exist together, the unconscious desire contains the Controlling Idea or Theme. *Carnal Knowledge*: Jack Nicholson's conscious desire is the perfect woman, but his unconscious desire is to trash all women. *Mrs. Soffel*: Diane Keaton's conscious desire is to convert Mel Gibson, but her unconscious desire is a transcendent romantic experience with him.
- iv. The hero has *needs* on three levels that must be satisfied or solved.
 - (1) Extra-Personal or Story Need: The hero is thrust into the middle of a problem that may or may not involve him, but which has particular relevance to him and his personal needs. Ex: war.
 - (2) Intra-Personal or Psychological Need: Strictly personal and based on weaknesses the hero must overcome: Ex: fear.
 - (3) Inter-Personal or Moral Needs: Involves others and usually comes as a result of the psychological need. Ex: cowardice.
- v. He has the *capacity* to reach his goal;

Ghost: The hero often is haunted by an event in the past which affects his ability to deal with the present conflict. However, he has the capacity to overcome the ghost and succeed. The ghost usually is not discussed in detail until Act II when the action lulls.
- vi. He will pursue his desire to a *point* beyond which the audience cannot imagine another; he will go “to the end of the line” to resolve the conflict with the antagonist.
- vii. He is *empathetic*; I recognize myself in him and root for him to get his goal;
 - (1) More than sympathy, empathy is a feeling of connection or bonding with a character. As the character wrestles with the choice, we wrestle with him and we care about the outcome.
 - (2) Building Empathy: Place the character in a situation where a difficult choice is presented (between conflicting goods or between the lesser of two evils). When he chooses as we would, we experience an empathetic bonding with him. We say to ourselves “I’m like that...” or “That’s what I would’ve done...”
- viii. He is usually (but not always) *sympathetic* (likeable);
- ix. He always does the most *conservative, non-risky* thing in pursuit of his goal;

- x. He is the *center of good* of the story; and,
 - (1) Def: While the characters in *The Godfather* are not sympathetic, the film works because they have a trait we empathize with: family closeness. They are “relatively good,” compared to the other characters.
 - (2) Ex: Even though Michael Douglas is a cheating womanizer in *Fatal Attraction*, we empathize with him because we all have felt the temptation.
 - (3) Contrary: But when empathy is missing, the film fails: *Raging Bull*.
- xi. He is only as *good as his antagonist is bad*.
 - (1) He's only as interesting and good as his Antagonist *forces* him to be; he won't want to go through the experience you are writing for him. He will resist because that is human nature -- nobody likes to exercise.
 - (2) When there is no specific individual antagonist, use the forces of antagonism to place the Protagonist in the position of *underdog*.

5. THE ANTAGONIST

a. Three Main Questions

- i. Who wants to stop the Protagonist from getting his goal and why?
- ii. What does the Antagonist want?
- iii. What are the Antagonist's values and where or how do they conflict with the Protagonist's?

b. **The Antagonist's Character:** A direct reflection of the Protagonist: Since the Protagonist is only as good as the Antagonist, the Antagonist must be one mean S.O.B.

c. **The Antagonist as Ally:** An interesting twist, the Antagonist masquerades from the Protagonist (and often, the Audience) as an ally poseur, waiting for the chance to catch the Protagonist off guard. This connection with the Protagonist may create a conflict of interests for the Antagonist later when he has the opportunity to destroy the Protagonist.

6. THE LOVE INTEREST

PURPOSE: The means by which the hero gets transformed; through “love” or someone believing in him or her.

7. SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

a. **Compare with Main Characters:** Main Characters are the Protagonist, Antagonist, and Love Interest. Supporting Characters are “foreground” accompanying characters that play a substantial role in the story. There are usually no more than two or three supporting characters.

b. What Does the Supporting Character Do?

- i. Reveals Facets of the Hero: Bring out the different facets of the hero's character. Each SC brings out one particular trait of the hero.
- ii. The Ally; Hero's Conscience: A sounding board for the hero's ideas and to keep the hero from talking to himself.
- iii. He Defines the Hero: One of the easiest ways to define a hero is by the comparative method. Give the SC a desire line that runs contrary to the hero, but not contradictory (that's the Antagonist's job). Ex: if the story's value is justice, and the hero's job is to mete out justice, make a SC who is ambivalent about justice; who says "do your own thing."

c. Types of Supporting Characters

- i. The Confidant: The person to whom the hero reveals himself, rather than tells his Concerns. *Miami Vice*
- ii. The Catalyst: People who provide information or initiate an event that pushes the hero into action.
- iii. The Backdrop: Illuminate the hero or antagonist in some way to help us understand who's important (bodyguards, security men, chauffeur, assistants, etc.) Provide mass and weight to a character.
- iv. Comic Relief: Lighten up the story and release audience tension. Danny DeVito's character in *Romancing the Stone* and R2D2 and C3PO in *Star Wars*
- v. The Foil: The character in contrast with the hero who helps us see the hero more clearly because of the differences between them; they yield high relief.
- vi. Thematic Characters: Characters which convey the theme of the film. *Out of Africa, A Passage to India, the Color Purple*. Balancing function.
- vii. "Voice Of" Characters: *Witness*: Eli is the voice of Amish nonviolence. Usually one-dimensional, they express one aspect only of the theme. Their ideas are conveyed through attitude and action.
- viii. "POV" Characters: *Star Wars*: Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda are the philosophy of the Force.
- ix. "Audience POV" Characters: Lets us know how we should feel or think about a situation. Often used to answer audience questions about possibility and "incredible" material, such as the supernatural, UFOs, psychics, reincarnation, etc.

d. Supporting Characters and Subplot: The SCs are used to dimensionalize the Story Values. They give differing perspectives of the Main Idea.

e. Caveats

- i. Complexity: They are, necessarily, less complex than the main character.
- ii. Not Better Than Hero: Don't make the SC more appetizing than the hero.

- iii. Polar Relationships Are Best: Never have two characters who react the same and have the same attitudes. This maximizes the conflict.
- f. **Bit Players:** Written flat on purpose, so as not to take attention away from the main character.

8. ELEMENTS OF STRUCTURE

a. Definitions

- i. “Story”: One master event that changes the character's life; the total sum of the character's life. You can tap into any time of their lives to begin the story. The sum total of all beats, scenes, sequences and acts resulting in an essentially “new” person.
- ii. “Choices”: Boiling down the character's life to the main elements that will span two hours.
- iii. “Event”: A moment of change which is meaningful.
- iv. “Structure”: A series of events selected from the story material, then composed into a specific sequence.
- v. “Values”: Qualities of life from which we receive a positive or negative charge. The heart of storytelling.
- vi. “Conflict”: An eternal truth. “Opposition in all things.” The essence of drama and change.
- vii. “Beat”: The smallest unit of structure. A specific human behavior in an action/reaction pattern, such as a question asked and answered.
- viii. “Scene”: A group of beats which result in an action through conflict in continuous time and space that turns the lives of the characters around into another direction. There are 40 to 60 scenes in a screenplay.
- ix. “Sequence”: A series of scenes which climax in an event.
- x. “Act”: A series of sequences which result in a major reversal for the character.
- xi. “Climax”: The reversal at the end of Act III which is the biggest reversal or change in the life of the character being told in the story. The “Mt. Everest” of events in the story.

b. Conflict

- i. What it Is
 - (1) Unpredictable: The Hero encounters unpredictable, almost overpowering opposition to his pursuit of his goal, requiring a stretching of his abilities to overcome the opposition.
 - (2) Mutually Exclusive Goals: The Protagonist and the Antagonist clash in the pursuit of their goals.

- ii. Types or Levels of Conflict: (Freudian thought)
 - (1) Inner (Intra-Personal): Ego conflict.
 - (2) Relational (Inter-Personal): Conflicts with others, usually just one person: Protagonist versus Antagonist.
 - (3) Social (Extra-Personal): Conflicts with society. Individual against the system, bureaucracy, gangs, agencies, families, corporations, etc.
 - (4) Situational (Extra-Personal): life and death situations, disaster films *Poseidon Adventure*, *Towering Inferno*.
 - (5) Cosmic: Conflicts with the Universe, God and Nature. Salieri declares war on God in *Amadeus*.
- iii. Conflict Problems: Too many conflicts; too many antagonists; unmatched opponents; lacking strong visual and emotional terms.
- iv. Conflict Unclear? Ask these questions:
 - (1) What is the risk?
 - (2) What does the hero want?
 - (3) How is he jeopardized or blocked from achieving his goal?
- v. Paradigm: The Unexpected Result
 - (1) The protagonist acts, expecting a certain result; but,
 - (2) He is met with an unexpected result that blocks him (the gap); so,
 - (3) He digs deeper within himself to find another way to reach his goal, raising the stakes; but,
 - (4) This action is met by another unexpected result that blocks him;
 - (5) Which requires the protagonist to risk even more on a third action;
 - (6) etcetera... until the ultimate risk or climax!

c. Acts: Three Act Structure

- i. History: The proven form for story telling from ancient times. “Screenplays are structure”: William Goldman.
- ii. Modern Changes: The long (60 minute) Act II requires care to keep it moving. We do this by:
 - (1) Related Subplots: weave in and out of the main plot, expanding on the controlling idea.
 - (2) A “Mid-Act” climax at 60 minutes, yielding, in effect, a four act structure: *Casablanca*.
 - (3) Expanding the number of Acts: *Raiders of the Lost Ark* contains no less than seven acts! The first act is the Peruvian Jungle Act and lasts just 10 minutes.

iii. Reversals

- (1) Scene Reversals: Reverse the ending to each scene, sequence and act from the one before. This roller-coaster ride will place the protagonist in the required jeopardy or state of false security that sets him up for a surprise reversal, propelling the story forward.
- (2) Act Climax Reversals: The second and third act climaxes are the two biggest reverses in your film. If the Act II ending is negative, the Act III climax must be positive, or vice versa.
- (3) False Ending: The supposed climax of the film is in reality a false ending and will be reversed a moment later, surprising the characters on screen and the audience: *Fatal Attraction*, *Aliens*, *Terminator*.

d. Subplot

i. Varying Purposes

- (1) Carries the Theme: While the plot carries the action, the subplot carries the theme. Use the subplot to drive home your message to the audience. Since they will be engrossed in the main plot, your “preaching” will not be red-flagged.
- (2) Contrasts or Contradicts the Main Plot: If the main plot has a happy ending (+) love story, a down ending (-) subplot will give a bittersweet or ironic twist to the story.
- (3) Variation on Main Plot Theme: Another way of restating the main idea. In the film *Diner*: (1) Controlling Idea: Men cannot communicate with women. (2) Variation Subplots on Main Theme: Kevin Bacon cannot even talk to women, while Mickey Rourke is incessantly hitting on them -- equally as uncommunicative.
- (4) A Lead-In for the Main Plot: Sets up the opening of a film. *Rocky*: The Rocky-Adrian love story subplot builds empathy and exposes character, building us for the I.I. (Creed picks Rocky) of the Main Plot (the fight).
- (5) Complicates the Main Plot: Love story subplot inside detective story main plot. *Foul Play*.

ii. Structure of Subplots

- (1) Just like the main plot: clear set-up, turning points, developments and a satisfying pay-off at the end.
- (2) Must intersect with main plot: The subplot cannot be a “free-floating vapor.” It must intersect and dimensionalize the plot line. Do this by making the subplot a variation on the main theme or tying the outcome of the main plot with the outcome of the subplot.
- (3) *Tootsie*: Has five subplots, each of which complicate Michael's life, all of which expand on the theme of love.

- iii. Main Plot and Subplot: Which is Which? Ask these Questions:
 - (1) Where is the movement of the story coming from? (main plot)
 - (2) Where is most of the action? (main plot)
 - (3) What is my theme? (subplot)
 - (4) What do I want to say? (subplot)

e. **Turning Points**

- i. Def: As a result of the gap between a conflict and a crisis decision, the character's choice will turn their life into another Direction: *Trading Places* (poor-rich), *Wall Street*. (honest-dishonest). Every scene is a turning point, either great or small.
- ii. Effect
 - (1) Surprises Audience; an unexpected turn of events.
 - (2) Yields Insight: We search for the reason for the turning point, returning in our minds to previous story events, discovering the answer which was placed in the script to set up this pay off.
 - (3) New Direction: The story goes off in another unexpected direction.
 - (4) Central Question: The Central Question is raised again and we wonder about the answer.
 - (5) Moment of Decision or Commitment: The Hero must decide whether or not to risk something in his pursuit of his goal.
 - (6) Ups the Ante: The TP raises the stakes and puts the Hero's goal even farther from view.
 - (7) Examples of Major Turning Points: *Star Wars*: Darth reveals his fatherhood to Luke. *Chinatown*: Nicholson discovers the truth about Dunaway's "sister/daughter."

9. **MAIN PLOT EVENTS**

- a. **Set-up**: Begin with a VISUAL IMAGE which gives us a strong sense of place, mood, texture, and sometimes, theme.

Witness: Grain blowing in the wind, Amish dressed in simple black, horse-drawn wagons, farmhouse, funeral, faces.

The African Queen: Heathen blacks, Christianized natives, pious white missionaries, unpius Alnutt, singers and nonsingers, civilized, uncivilized.

- b. **The Inciting Incident**

- i. Def: A required, dynamic, fully developed event (catalyst) that draws us into the story.

- ii. Three Kinds
 - (1) Action: A murder (*Witness*), seeing a ghost (*Ghostbusters*), a swimmer is killed by a shark (*Jaws*).
 - (2) Dialogue: A woman is told she has cancer (movies of the week).
 - (3) Situational: A pair of feet walk into a mad scientist's workshop, crazy gadgets, dozens of clocks, container of plutonium: *Back to the Future*.
- iii. Function: The II. radically upsets the balance of forces in the main character's life, putting them on the road to change; it arouses in the protagonist the need/desire to put their life back in balance. It asks the question that is answered in the climax: "Will John Book get the murderer?"
- iv. Hero Is Aware of the Inciting Incident: He cannot be ignorant of the II., like in *the River*.
- v. Unconscious Desire: The II. may also arouse the unconscious desire which may conflict with the conscious desire.
- vi. Effect: The Inciting Incident arouses in the audience's mind the Main Question of the story and inspires the need to see the Obligatory Scene (Climax). Example: *Jaws*. Inciting Incident: Shark eats the swimmer. Main Question: Will the shark be stopped? Obligatory or Climactic Scene: Sheriff and shark come face to face.
- vii. When to bring it in: Anytime in Act I. Usually, the sooner the better (*Raiders*), but you can wait until the last minute (*Casablanca*: II: Rick meets Ilsa for the first time in the story). Rule of thumb: Bring the II. in as soon as you can give the audience a full emotional experience.
- viii. Questions to Ask about the Inciting Incident
 - (1) What is the worst thing that could happen to my hero and how could that turn out to be the best thing that ever happened to him? (This will necessarily draw on his deep character to achieve his goal of getting balance back.)
 - (2) Does the II. appear true to the world of the film? It needn't be rolling boulders (*Raiders*), it may be as simple as putting french toast down the disposal (*Ordinary People*).
- c. **Act Two: Progressive Complications / Rising Action**

- i. Definition: Conflict is to story what sound is to music; it propels the story forward.
- ii. Effect: Characters act toward their goals. The effect of their actions is to arouse forces of antagonism that arise to block their way.
- iii. What is "Progress"? Progress occurs when you pass points of no return. The actions and reactions increase with each succeeding conflict. If not, the plot bogs down.

- iv. When it Doesn't Work and Why: Insufficient momentum and lack of focus. The movie has moved off the “spine” of the story through unrelated scenes, talky characters doling out exposition, no action.
- v. Complication vs. Complexity
 - (1) Complication: pitching the conflict on just one level
 - (2) Inner only: stream-of-consciousness novels.
 - (3) Personal only: soap operas.
 - (4) Grand Scale only: pointless war stories.
- vi. Complexity: pitching the conflict on several levels at once: (inner, personal and grand scale). Result: The Epic. *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Doctor Zhivago*.
- vii. Rule of Thumb: Write simple, complex stories.

d. Action Points

- i. Types of Action Points
 - (1) Barrier: Character tries something which doesn't work. He must change direction and try another action. The barrier forces the character to dig deep inside himself and think. This propels the story forward.
 - (2) Complication: An action point that doesn't pay off immediately. The complication gets in the way of the character's intention. Builds suspense and raises the stakes.
 - (3) Reversal: Stronger than most turning points, which merely change direction slightly, the Reversal changes the direction of the story 180 degrees; from a positive to a negative or vice versa. Work on physical or emotional levels.
- ii. Effect: An Action Point sets up the Crisis Decision which is a static moment; an internal struggle. When the decision is made, action resumes and explodes into the climax.

e. Crisis Decision or Decision Gap

- i. Definition: The moment when the forces of good meet face to face with the forces of evil; the dark before the dawn; the dangerous opportunity, the moment of truth, the Obligatory Scene.
- ii. Example: *Star Wars*: While attacking the Death Star, Luke turns off his targeting computer (Crisis Decision). His success underscores the Value of the film, which is “listen to your feelings; use the Force.”
- iii. Making it Work: Write it backwards, starting at the climax.

f. **Further Complications**

- i. Don't Stop There: Once the Crisis Decision is made, a great story teller will place yet another, more difficult decision opportunity in the Protagonist's path, upping the stakes even more and further complicating the Protagonist's life. This is very difficult to do, but is the key to immensely successful films.
- ii. Example: *Empire Strikes Back*: When he encounters Vader, Luke must decide whether to fight or flee (Decision Gap). He decides to fight (Crisis Decision). But when Vader reveals his fatherhood, Luke must decide whether to join him, fight or commit suicide by falling off the catwalk (Decision Gap). Luke chooses suicide (Crisis Decision). He is saved by Han Solo as he hangs on the antenna (Twist; almost a Deus Ex Machina ending).

g. **Climactic Action**

- i. Definition: When the Protagonist puts the Crisis Decision into play and takes it “to the end of the line.”
- ii. Effect: It usually occurs immediately following the Crisis Decision. The Climactic Action should answer the Main Idea of the film.
- iii. How to Do It
 - (1) Do it through action, not dialogue.
 - (2) “Give the audience what they want, but not how they want it.” William Goldman.
 - (3) Deliver it with surprise and insight.
 - (4) “The key to a film ending is that it be spectacle (camera-attractive) and truth (the Controlling Idea).” Francois Truffaut.
- iv. Subplots: Often, the subplots climax at or near the Main Climax point.
Casablanca: When Rick puts Lazslo and Ilsa on the plane, he resolves not only the Main Plot (Rick/Ilsa love story), but also the political drama subplot and his own lack of idealism subplot.

h. **Resolution. Three Uses**

- i. Tie up subplots: if they haven't already been concluded: *Return of the Jedi*: Han/Leia love story subplot. *Broadcast News*: individual lives subplots. *The Inlaws*: the kids wedding subplot.
- ii. Show the ripple effects of the Main Plot Climax.
- iii. Bring the audience down gradually by drawing a slow curtain. Let them dry their tears in the dark without embarrassment.

10. TOOLS OF THE WRITER

a. Creating Emotion in the Audience

- i. Empathy: When the character experiences a reversal (+ or -), the audience experiences it too. This emotion lasts for the duration of the turning point.
- ii. Alternating Emotions: You cannot line up emotions back to back; you must reverse them. Cry-laugh-cry-laugh. The only exception is when the same kind of emotions contrast mightily with each other. Ex: couple arguing (-), then one kills the other (ultra -).
- iii. Mood: Feeling, not emotion; the atmosphere or ambience of the film. Usually technically based. Not an emotion; it sets up for the emotion.
- iv. Melodrama: Melodrama is under-motivation in a scene. It doesn't ring true to the audience. Proper motivation yields "high drama."

b. Logic

- i. Deductive vs. Inductive. Deductive: from general to specific. Inductive: from specific to general
- ii. Causal Connections: The "if-thens" of the story.
- iii. Organization: No such thing as "Creation Ex Nihilo." Creativity is organization; discovery of hidden relationships between objects, ideas and people.
- iv. Surprise Through Synthesis. Steps:
 - (1) Take an idea to its logical, predictable conclusion: Hero knocks on the door and it opens;
 - (2) Find the opposite, dramatic, and unpredictable result: The door doesn't open;
 - (3) Synthesize another result (unpredictable on two levels: what and how) which surprises the audience and the character: The door melts or disappears or the ceiling caves in, etc., thereby maintaining the integrity of the opposite result and surprising the audience.
- v. Coincidence: Random coincidences are a part of life, but are intrinsically meaningless. Since the writer is supposed to find meaning from experience, coincidence is problematic. While getting hit by a car is a coincidence and therefore meaningless, what you do as a result of the coincidence can be very meaningful. Do you give up or struggle to get well?
- vi. Logic Problems: If there are holes in the story, don't worry: there are also holes in life. The question to ask is: "Will the audience notice it?"
- vii. *Chinatown*: The first Mrs. Mulwray gives Gittes clues to the scam she couldn't possibly have known.
- viii. *Terminator*: If the "savior" was born and sent Biehn back in time to protect Sara, obviously Biehn succeeds, so why all the worry?

c. Nature of Choice

- i. What doesn't work: The choice between opposites like good and evil is no choice at all. The character will always choose the right thing in his point of view.
- ii. What does work: The choice between irreconcilable goods or the lesser of two evils.
- iii. Multiple Characters and Choice: Two character stories (protagonist/antagonist) do not work well. Another character is needed to give the complexity required to flesh out all the possible choices the main character has to consider and make.

A can team up with C against B

B can team up with A against C

C can team up with B against A

- iv. With each additional character you add, you multiply the number of relationships geometrically.
- v. Ramifications of Choice On
 - (1) Society: *Kramer Vs. Kramer*: The neighbors, his boss and company, school teachers, new girl friend, hospital, courts and lawyers were all affected.
 - (2) Professionals: Because these lines of work affect greater numbers of people, their stories are the most common told in film.
 - (3) Female Stories: Because of the traditional small scope of the female lifestyle (i.e., in the home, not in the workforce), their stories are harder to come by. Opposite examples: *Norma Rae* (works) and *Places in the Heart* (doesn't work).
 - (4) Small Circle of People: Drive the story deeper into a small number of people's lives: *Ordinary People*.
 - (5) Both of the above (deeper and wider): *Chinatown*.

d. Creating Unity in the Story

- i. Causality: There must be a clear causal relationship between the Inciting Incident and the Climax. This is done through unity of theme and scenes.
- ii. Scene Sequences: A group of individual scenes that are tied together to form a beginning, middle and an end; a "mini-story." *Raiders of the Lost Ark*: "Jungles of Peru" sequence precedes the opening titles.
- iii. Foreshadowing: Set-ups and Pay-offs
 - (1) Set-Up: Must be done firmly enough so the audience will remember it when the Pay-Off comes around. Don't be too heavy handed.
 - (2) Pay-Off: Gives the audience the "pleasure of insight." Often, the Pay-Off becomes a new Set-Up for a later Pay-off: *Star Wars*: Darth's revelation to Luke of their relationship sets up *the Return of the Jedi*.

- iv. Recurring Motifs: A recurring image or rhythm or sound that is used throughout the film. *Jaws*: The musical score warns the audience the shark is near.
- v. Repetition: Comes from images, dialogue, character traits, sound. *Butch Cassidy*: Dialogue: “Who are those guys?”
- vi. Contrast: Polar opposites are shown to drive home the point of the scene or story. It throws certain information into high relief, making us notice it more because we've been introduced to its opposite. Also used as a juxtaposition device: The loud church bell contrasts with the quiet pastoral scene in the town. *Witness*: John Book punches out the punk in sharp contrast to the Amish nonviolence.

e. Rhythm and Tempo

- i. Rhythm is how it moves along. The length of scenes establishes the rhythm. The average screenplay has 60 scenes -- just two pages per scene. Any longer and the film begins to move too slow. Keep scenes short and concise.
- ii. Tempo is the level of activity in the scene.
- iii. Solving Static Staging Problems: *12 Angry Men*: Break the room into several “mini-locations” to fight monotony.
- iv. Increasing Tempo: As we head toward the Act Climax (or any major scene), we increase the tempo. Even though the climax itself may be quite slow moving, it becomes an “earned” rest.

f. Archetypes

Demonstrating Them: Moving from the particular to the universal: Characters evolve into archetypal beings. *Deerhunter*: Ordinary guys become archetypal “hunter/killers.” *Terminator*: Waitress (Sara) is pursued through a labyrinth/hell (Los Angeles) and becomes a “mother of a god” (her son who will defeat the machines in the future). Classic form.

g. Values

- i. Definition: Every story has a Main Theme or Value; one word that expresses what the story is about: Truth, Justice, Honesty, etc.
- ii. Associated Values: Often stories are structured so as to take the audience down this avenue from good to bad to worse and back to good:
 - (1) Value (positive)
 - (2) Contrary (ambivalence)
 - (3) Contradictory (negative)
 - (4) Negation of the Negation (utter negative)
- iii. Example: *Missing*: Value: Justice
 - (1) Act I: Contrary Value: Unfairness (Lemmon treated unjustly by local officials).

- (2) Act II: Contradictory Value: Injustice (Lemmon discovers his son was murdered).
- (3) Act III: Negation of the Negation: Tyranny (There is no justice in Chile -- Lemmon goes home empty handed, but
- (4) Climax: Positive Value: Justice (Lemmon does experience a small sort of satisfaction: his son died nobly for a good cause; there is an element of justice.

iv. Example: *...And Justice for All*: Value: Justice

- (1) Act I: Contrary Value: Unfairness (Pacino is a lawyer in an unfair system).
- (2) Act II: Contradictory Value: Injustice (Pacino is required to defend a guilty judge).
- (3) Act III: Negation of the Negation: Tyranny (The other judges collude to force Pacino to defend the guilty judge).
- (4) Climax: Positive Value: Justice (Pacino turns the tables and exposes the judge, at great cost to his own career, but it was worth it).

v. Table

VALUE AT STAKE

<u>Positive</u>	<u>Contrary</u>	<u>Contradictory</u>	<u>Negation of Negation</u>
Consciousness	Unconsciousness	Death	Damnation
Justice	Unfairness	Injustice	Tyranny
Love	Indifference	Hate	Self-Hate
Truth	White Lies	Lies	Self-Deception
Communication	Alienation	Isolation	Insanity
Faith	Agnosticism	Atheism	Satanism
Intelligence	Ignorance	Stupidity	Stupidity seen as intelligence
Freedom	Restraints	Slavery	Self-enslavement
Courage	Fear	Cowardice	Act of seeming courage to cover cowardice
Naturally	Adultery	Rape	Necrophilia
Sanctioned	Pre-Marital	Incest	Bestiality
Sex	Masturbation	Child Abuse	Child murder
Maturity	Childishness	Immaturity	Immaturity masquerading as maturity

11. IRONY

- a. **Definition:** The incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the normal or expected result; an incongruity between a situation developed in a drama and the accompanying words or actions that is understood by the audience but not by the characters in the play; the “two edged sword” of human experience; “...Aah, life is just like that...;” “Nothing is what it seems...”

b. **Examples**

Gandhi: Gandhi is shot at the beginning of the film. The audience then moves through his life, knowing that he will be assassinated. We dread the inevitable outcome and feel compassion for him because we know more than he does -- we know he will be killed. We remain curious, not about what will happen, but how and why. See *Sunset Boulevard*, *Double Indemnity*, *Betrayal*.

Othello: He gets at last what he's always wanted: an honest wife. Unfortunately, he has just smothered her with a pillow.

Ruthless People: Judge Reinhold is pushed further and further from his goal, only to be led right to it.

The Inlaws: He comes into possession of something he is certain will make him miserable (Peter Falk), does everything he can do to get rid of it, and it turns out to be the gift of happiness.

- c. **Common Thread:** The Hero is certain of one thing, while life is conspiring instead to throw at him the complete opposite.

d. **Dramatizing Exposition**

- i. Visualize It: “Convert Exposition to Ammunition”: Show it, don't tell it.
- ii. Mete it out Patiently: Don't rush it. It doesn't have to all come out in the first act. The best films are giving exposition right until the last scene: *Empire Strikes Back*: Vader's secret revealed to Luke.
- iii. Spotting Bad Exposition: If the character says something that all the other characters in the scene know, circle it and ask “am I showing or telling?”
- iv. Using the Backstory: Use the backstory to turn the story. Open the gap between expectation and result. Do it by action or revelation. *Chinatown*: Dunaway's admission that the woman she is harboring is her sister and her daughter comes from the backstory, yet is used as a major story reversal.
- v. Flashbacks: Difficult to use well. Key: Dramatize the flashback -- make it a discrete story with a beginning, middle and an end. *Casablanca*: Rick and Ilsa in Paris.
- vi. Voice Over Narration: If the story works without the voice over, then leave it in, because it works as counterpoint. *Hanna and Her Sisters*, *a Christmas Story*. Contrast *Bladerunner*: Early previews disclosed audience confusion about whether the protagonist was Harrison Ford or Rutger Hauer. The V.O. was added to clarify and enhance Ford's character and because it was needed, it didn't work!

e. **Text and Subtext**

- i. Definitions: Text: What people say and do; surface actions and words. Subtext: What people think and feel; sub-surface; their “hidden agenda.” Why they do what they do.
- ii. Duality: Life is this duality between words and feelings; expressed and unexpressed. A character will remain flat unless you write the subtext along with the text. There is always a subtext under the text.
- iii. Writing on the “nose”: Obvious, hack writing. Avoid it like the plague. See *Casablanca*.
- iv. Timing: Come into the scene late and get out early.

f. **Comedy Vs. Drama**

<u>Value</u>	<u>Comedy</u>	<u>Drama</u>
View of Humanity:	Cynical idealism	Admiration
Narrative Drive:	Breakable at Will	Unimpeded
Coincidence:	Abounds	Use Sparingly
Is the character aware of the humor?	Unaware	Aware
Deus Ex Machina ending?	Yes	Absolutely Not
Self-Awareness	No; Blindly Obsessive	Self-Aware

- i. How to Write It: Lecturing doesn't work, but exposing the shortcomings of the world with humor does.
- ii. Comedy is about social institutions, the name of which are often found in the title: *Network, Hospital, Stripes, down and out in Beverly Hills, Big Business, Airplane, M*A*S*H*
- iii. Structure: In Drama, the Narrative Drive propels the story unstoppably forward. In Comedy, however, you can stop the story and throw in a scene that has nothing at all to do with the story, just for laughs: *Little Shop of Horrors*: the Bill Murray/Steve Martin dentist scene.
- iv. Deus Ex Machina (“by the machine”) Ending: In ancient days, the drama was often taken from the hands of the protagonist and solved by a god that descended from the rafters of the theatre on a platform raised and lowered by pulleys (the machine). This breaks a cardinal rule of storytelling: Never take the power of the climax from the characters.
- v. Examples: Act of God, Disease, Auto Accident, etc. “The meaning of life is in our own hands.”
- vi. Blind Obsession: Comedy characters are not self-aware; they are blindly obsessive. *Pink Panther* films: Inspector Clouseau's obsession is to be the world's greatest detective. *A Fish Called Wanda*:

<u>Character</u>	<u>Obsession</u>
Michael Palin	Animals; Pets
Kevin Kline	Intellectuality
Jamie Curtis	Men Speaking Foreign Language
John Cleese	English Propriety

g. **Turning Points** . The biggest laughs of the show. In a pitch, without using dialogue, you can tell if the bit is funny just by what happens, not what is said. If they laugh, it's funny. If not... Great comedies are not gags. Instead the “feeder line” opens up a gap between expectation and result with a funny turn of events.

h. **Adaptation**

i. Which Medium Works Best?

<u>Conflict</u>	<u>Which Medium Works Best?</u>
Inner (Man vs. Himself)	Novels
Personal (Man vs. Man)	Theatre
Extra-Personal (Man vs. Society)	Films

ii. Unadaptable: Great literature is unadaptable; it must be re-invented for film. Suggested Reading: *Form and Meaning In Fiction*

i. **Dialogue**

- i. Compare with Conversation: Conversation is about maintaining relationships. When two friends meet on the street and talk about the weather, they are really saying, “I like you and want to spend a moment with you.” The text is unimportant; what is important is the subtext.
- ii. Economy of Words: Concise, thoughtful and purposeful. Never write a line of dialogue when you can communicate the same thing through action and nuance.
- iii. Syntax: Use short, simply constructed sentences. Drop articles and pronouns: “Wanna eat?”
- iv. Short Speeches: A film is a moving picture. 80% is visual, only 20% aural. If you cut away to the listener on an edit, you remove subtext and lip reading (which we all do).
- v. No Monologues: There are no monologues in life; we all look for reaction from our audience and we tailor our further language based on that reaction.
- vi. Sounds Good: Good dialogue sounds good when spoken. The opposite is also true. Have your actor friends read the script through start to finish (without interrupting them) before foisting it on the world. Tape record the evening and take notes.

j. Description

- i. Describe the Screen: A screenplay has no literary integrity. Avoid flowery, obtuse description. Simply describe what is happening on the screen. Put the sensation of watching a movie into the reader's head.
- ii. Write Vividly
 - (1) Name the “thing.” Don't write, “He picks up a big nail.” Instead, write, “He picks up a spike.”
 - (2) Verbs: Avoid passive verbs like “is” and “are.” Instead of saying “there is a big house on the hill,” say “A large mansion sits on the hill.”
- iii. Image Systems
 - (1) Definition: The different ways the story is brought to the audience: visually, dialogue, sound, music, etc. You are being poetic when your reader is transported inside the world you are writing about.
 - (2) Films and their image systems
 - Diabolique*: Water
 - Chinatown*: Water, Sexual Cruelty, Political Corruption as social cement, Seeing Falsely
 - After Hours*: Art as a Weapon
 - The Big Chill*: Materialism
 - Brazil*: Tubes and Ducts: Machinery as Living Things, People as Machines
 - Alien*: Sexual Imagery: Vaginal Openings in the Alien Ship, Petrified Monster with huge phallus, John Hurt's Gruesome Parody of Birth
 - Aliens*: Motherhood: “The Monster Makes You Pregnant”

k. Analyzing Scene Structure. Ask:

- i. Who Drives the Scene? What do they want in both the text and subtext?
- ii. Who Stands In the Way of the Driver? What do they want? Where does the conflict lie?
- iii. What Value is at Stake? Is it positive or negative?
- iv. What are the Beats? The action/reaction moment.
- v. What is the Scene Driver doing? Usually couched in a gerund: crying, laughing, pleading, threatening, etc.
- vi. What is the Other Character doing? Arguing, retreating, counter-offering, etc.
- vii. When they change from a action/reaction moment (he cajoles and she rejects) to another action/reaction moment (he threatens her and she threatens back), it is a new beat.

- viii. At the End of the Scene, Ask “How Have the Characters Changed as a Result of This Scene?” If they haven't, ask, “Is the scene necessary, then?”
- ix. Logical Transition: The scene should progress logically from one beat to another: apology/rejection; excuse/rejection; begging/softening; offering/counter-offering; angering/angering, etc. If it doesn't, look closer, certain parts might be redundant and unnecessary, or you might have left an important logical causal link out. Listen to people discuss things -- there is always causality.

12. CREATIVE PROCESS

- a. **The Unsuccessful Writer** dreams up an idea, goes to the typewriter and writes it, has friends read it and critique it, goes back to the typewriter and rewrites it, keeping those scenes friends liked and throwing out the ones they didn't, has friends read it again, rewrites it again . . . and it never gets any better!
- b. **The Successful Writer Will**
 - i. Write the STEP OUTLINE. Spend three months on three sheets of paper, one page for each act. One or two lines for each scene, with its purpose and action -- no dialogue! Don't be afraid to throw it away and start over! “The writer must kill his baby.” — William Goldman. Do the research: character and world, ideas, dreams, thoughts, etc.
 - ii. PITCH the Story to Friends: Take ten minutes and tell the story to a friend. Watch their eyes -- does the story grab them? You must hook them, hold them, and give them an emotional pay-off. If this doesn't work, go back to Step #1 and come up with a story that does work. When it does...
 - iii. Write the TREATMENT: A complete description of every scene, including subtext. Usually 60 pages or more. Do not write dialogue! If the scenes don't work, go back to the Step Outline and doctor the scenes, keeping the overall structure of the story intact. When this is satisfactory...
 - iv. Write the SCREENPLAY: Now, finally, you're ready to write the description and dialogue. You've spent so much time with your characters without letting them speak that they now have lots to say, and now is the time to listen to them talk.