

# Screenwriting

An Introduction

A dark blue, solid-colored shape that starts as a thin line at the bottom left and expands diagonally upwards to the right, filling the bottom right portion of the page.

# The Basics of Screenwriting

- Loglines
- The 3 Act Structure
- Format
- Theme
- Dialogue
- Character Objectives

# Loglines



# Loglines

According to the author of *Save the Cat!: The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need*, Blake Snyder states that “A logline is the one- or two-sentence description of your movie that tells us what it is” (188).

“The logline tells the hero’s story: Who he is, who he’s up against, and what’s at stake” (Snyder 63).

“By examining who your hero is and what his primal goal is, as well as the bad guy who is trying to stop him from achieving that goal, you can better identify and expand on the needs of your story” (Snyder 63).

“The logline with the most conflict, the most sharply defined hero and bad guy, and the clearest, most primal goal is the winner” (Snyder 63).

# Examples of Loglines

## **SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (1991)**

“A young F.B.I. cadet must confide in an incarcerated and manipulative killer to receive his help on catching another serial killer who skins his victims” (Film Daily).

## **THE MATRIX (1999)**

“A computer hacker learns from mysterious rebels about the true nature of his reality and his role in the war against its controllers” (Film Daily).

## **DJANGO UNCHAINED (2012)**

“With the help of a German bounty hunter, a freed slave sets out to rescue his wife from a brutal Mississippi plantation owner” (Film Daily).

# Logline for *The Wizard of Oz*:

## **The Wizard of Oz (1939)**

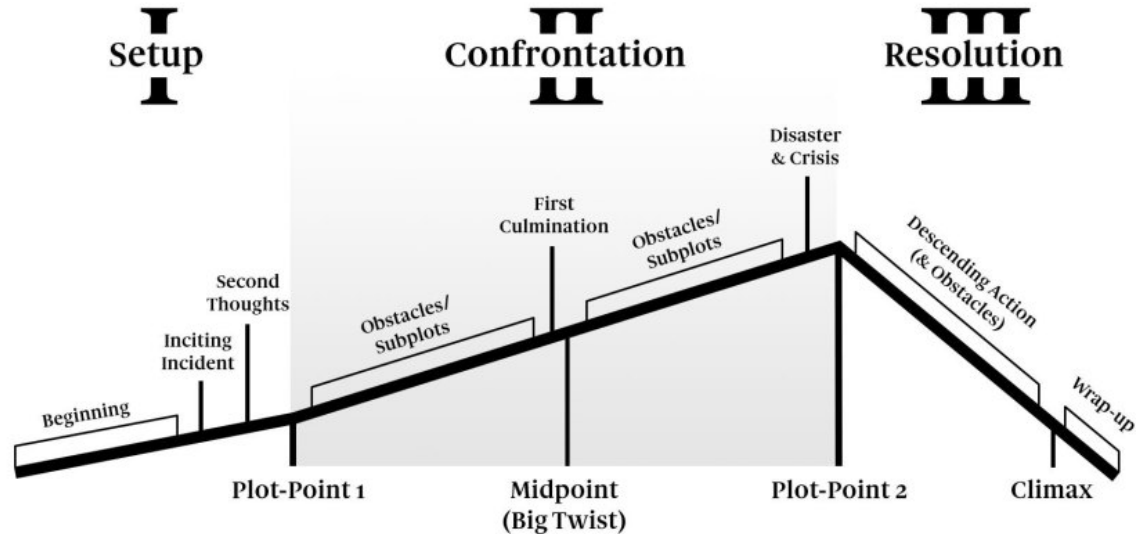
Dorothy Gale, an ignorant but brave teenager, is swept away by a tornado from her Kansas farm to a magical land called Oz, where she must embark on a quest to see the Wizard in order to return home, all while having to combat an evil witch out to kill her.

# The 3 Act Structure



# The 3 Act Structure

## Three-Act Structure





# Act I : Setup

“**1. Ordinary life:** getting to know who the central character is and what his issue (flaw) is. We see the protagonist in his usual surroundings, dealing with the usual people in his life, but we also see that he has some issues and that there is a need for change. He may or may not know that” (Chitlik 2).

# Act I : Setup

“**2. Inciting Incident:** Something happens to your protagonist that will change his life forever. Eventually, it will compel him to act. It will help him define his goal” (Chitlik 4).

# Act I : Setup

“**3. End of Act One:** when your character decides on a course of action in order to deal with whatever the inciting incident brought up. Usually, another major event forces him to decide that he must take action. A plan is a part of that...Now your character has a goal, and your story has focus” (Chitlik 6).

## Act II : Conflict

**“4. Midpoint or turning point.** Yes, this does happen right around the middle wherein the action takes a sudden and new unexpected direction. The goal may change. The central character may realize what his flaw is. His true needs become more important than what he wants” (Chitlik 6-7).

## Act II: Conflict

“**5. The low point:** end of the second act. The all-is-lost point in terms of the goal. It appears there’s no way in hell he’ll ever reach his goal” (Chitlik 7-8).

# Act III: Resolution

“**6. The final challenge.** At the beginning of Act Three, your protagonist sees something, hears something, or even remembers something that reanimates him and gives him the will to continue” (Chitlik 8).

## Act III: Resolution

“7. **The return to** (the now-changed-forever) **normal life**. Two or three pages to show us that life goes on and that our character has triumphed and changed” (Chitlik 9).

Format





# Format

Christopher Riley, author of *The Hollywood Standard: Script Format & Style*, states:

1. “*Shot headings* begin each new scene or shot. They may give general information about a scene’s location and the time of day the scene takes place...” (23).

Examples:

**INT. PENTAGON - DAY**

**EXT. PENTAGON - NIGHT**

# Format

2. “Shot headings are most often followed by *direction*, passages that describe what is being seen and heard within the shot or scene...” (Riley 23).

When introducing a character for the first time capitalize their name, important characters get an age and brief description -- use adjectives to describe appearance and personality.

Example:

**MICAH (32), a convict covered in mud with a thirst for freedom, crawls under a fence, barbed wire snagging his tattered jumpsuit. The beam of a searchlight passes and he presses himself into the ground, desperate to make himself invisible.**

# Format

3. “*Dialogue* consists of the name of the character who is speaking, the actual words that are spoken, and any parenthetical character direction related to the dialogue...” (Riley 23).

Example:

**MIMI**  
**That just figures, don't it?**  
**(smacks steering wheel)**  
**I go and steal me a car without no gas.**

Theme



# Examples of Themes:

## Themes:

- Coming of Age / Loss of Innocence
- Love
- Mortality
- Good vs. Evil
- Corruption of Power

## Thematic Conflicts:

- Protagonist vs. Antagonist
- Protagonist vs. Nature
- Protagonist vs. Society
- Protagonist vs. Self

# Themes in the Wizard of Oz:

Theme: “There’s no place like home.”

Thematic Conflicts:

- Protagonist vs. Antagonist
- Protagonist vs. Self
- Protagonist vs. Society

# Finding your theme:

- What questions are you asking yourself as you write?
- What images and metaphors are you using?

Dialogue





# Dialogue

--According to Linda J. Cowgill in Writing Short Films:

Great dialogue should:

- Advance the plot towards its climax
- Advance the audience's understanding of the main character
- Advance the audience's understanding of the story by providing information which can't be shown
- Set the tone for the film (i.e. telling a joke!)

# Dialogue

Dialogue should be a balance of both natural and concise language.

Tip for Practicing: Eavesdrop and Revise

# Dialogue

Text and Subtext: Characters don't always say exactly what they are thinking

Tip for Practicing: Write a scene where the characters say all their inner thoughts. Then write the same scene where the characters' thoughts aren't spoken out loud.

# Dialogue

Action vs. Dialogue: Look for ways to show a character's inner thoughts through action, instead of through dialogue

Tip for practicing: Assign an action to every thought your character has in a scene. How many lines of dialogue can you remove from the scene and replace with actions while still clearly expressing the meaning of the scene?

# Character Objective



# Objective

- What does your character want/need?
- What obstacles are in your character's way of achieving their goals?
- What tactics do they use to achieve their goals?
- How do these tactics change throughout the film?

## Works Cited

Chitlik, Paul. *Rewrite: A Step-By-Step Guide to Strengthen Structure, Characters, and Drama in Your Screenplay*. Michael Wiese Productions, 2008.

Cowgill, Linda J. *Writing Short Films: Structure and Content for Screenwriting, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Watson-Guption Publications, 2005.

*Film Daily*. <http://www.filmdaily.tv/logline/top-box-office-logline-examples>. Accessed 20 March 2019.

Riley, Christopher. *The Hollywood Standard, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: The Complete and Authoritative Guide to Script Format and Style*. Michael Wiese Productions, 2009.

Snyder, Blake. *Save the Cat! The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need*. Michael Wiese Productions, 2005.