

Screenwriting



3-Act structure handy reference guide

A convenient checklist to keep your screenplay on track

by Michael Barmish



FREE



Introduction

The 3-Act structure has been around since the dawn of writing, since the dawn of storytelling. In fact it has been around since the Greek antiquity and its philosophers, in particular Aristotle who proposed the definition of tragedy.

Over the past decade and especially since cinema and writing screenplays became one of the most popular ways of storytelling, a myriad of great books around the 3-Act structure - most of them inspired by the 3-Act Greek tragedy - have been published.

This reference guide is not designed to replace any of these helpful books and philosophies. Rather, it's designed to provide you with a visual checklist as you develop and write your screenplay--something to keep by your computer, on your mobile or printed out on

your wall as a comprehensive chart of the key elements of the 3-Act structure.

Instead of thumbing through pages and chapters of books you've read to find the section you want, this guide is a supplement that will help keep you focused on what matters most - developing your story.

Using the guide

Today, the typical feature-length screenplay is usually between 100 and 110 pages. The older formula of 120 pages is outdated, for the most part, as shorter has become better. That's not to say that 120 pages is bad. If you need it, write it. Likewise, if it's shorter

Below you will find a checklist diagram based on a 110 page feature script. You can adjust the items accordingly, based on your script length.

It's more important that you consider all the elements in the list no matter what the script's length is.

Again, as you can find many 3-act structure diagrams on the internet and in books, this is not designed to “reinvent the wheel”, but rather to offer you an interactive tool as you develop your screenplay.

Good luck and happy writing!

Act 1

Establish the world theme, tone, hook, and genre

Ask yourself - What is your intention for these elements and how are they conveyed to the reader.

Introduce Protagonist and Antagonist

Note that this is a general guideline and sometimes they are introduced later.

Inciting Incident

Ask yourself - Is the timing of the incident right or can it be sooner? Is the incident strong enough to rock your main character's world?

Call to Action

Ask yourself - How organic is the main character's decision to enter into this new action?

End of Act 1 Plot Point

Ask yourself - What is the major change or setting that propels the story into Act 2?

Act 2

Key Characters Introduced (Other than the protagonist)

Note that as the main character enters the new world of Act 2, key characters need to be organically written into the story.

«B» and possible additional stories introduced

Note that, while not every story has B and C plots, many do.

Ask yourself - How do the sub-stories relate to and support the A story?

Rising Obstacles and Stakes

Ask yourself - Are these obstacles and stakes increasing the tension and is it organic?

MIDPOINT

Ask yourself - How is this moment your main character's highest or lowest point - the moment that intensifies your story.

Higher obstacles and stakes

Ask yourself - Are the stakes getting bigger and driving the story forward?

Crisis

Ask yourself - What is this my main character's "all is lost moment"?

End of Act Plot Point

Ask yourself - How did my main character organically reach his/her decision based on the crisis moment?

Act 3

Final challenge, twist and obstacle

Ask yourself - How can I make this moment as big as possible?

B story conclusion

Note that any sub-stories must wrap up along with the A story with each having a bearing on the other.

Climax

Ask yourself - Has the tension and conflict between your Protagonist and Antagonist reached its ultimate conclusion?

Resolution

Ask yourself - Is your resolution strong enough so that the reader will end on the most satisfying note?

The checklist

Act 1

- Establish theme, tone, hook, and genre - 1st 10 pages
- Inciting Incident - approx. pg. 10
- Call to Action - approx. pg. 15
- End of Act 1 - Plot Point - approx. pg. 20-25

Act 2

- Key Characters introduced - as needed
- “B” and possible additional stories introduced - as needed
- Rising Obstacles and Stakes - throughout
- Midpoint - Character High or Low Point - approx. pg. 55
- High Obstacles and stakes throughout
- Crisis - all is lost moment - approx. pg. 75
- End of Act 2 Plot Point - Decision based on crisis - - approx. pg. 80

Act 3

- Final Challenge, twist and obstacle pages 85-100
- Climax - Approx. page 100
- Resolution - pg 110 (sooner if there is an epilogue)



Vidatech Ltd, 2020
ISBN : 978-1-913580-20-9