

SCREENWRITING

WHAT IS A SCREENPLAY?

Film is a visual medium that dramatizes a basic story line meaning a screenplay deals in pictures. We could say that a screenplay is a story told with pictures, in dialogue and description, and placed within the context of dramatic structure.

Screenplays have a basic linear structure that creates the form of the screenplay because it holds all the individual elements, or pieces, of the story line in place.

Standard structure consists of the beginning, middle and end.

Beginning (ACT I)
Set-Up ~ pp. 1 - 30

Middle (ACT II)
Confrontation ~ pp. 30 - 90

End (ACT III)
Resolution ~ pp. 90 - 120

The average film is approximately two hours long, or **roughly 120 pages**. It's a good rule of thumb to note that one minute of screen time is roughly one page of screenplay.

ACT I

Act 1, the beginning, is a unit of dramatic action that is approximately 20-30 pages long and is held together by the *Set-Up*. Here the screenwriter sets up the story, establishes character, launches the dramatic premise (what the story is about), and illustrates the situation (the circumstances surrounding the action), and creates the relationships between main character and the other characters who inhabit this world.

You've got about 10 pages/minutes to do this. Your audience needs to know the main character, dramatic premise, and situation.

ACT 2

Act 2 is roughly 60 pages long and held together by the *Confrontation*. During this second act the main character encounters obstacle after obstacle that keeps him/her from achieving his/her dramatic need, which is defined as what the character wants to win, gain, get, or achieve during the screenplay.

Act 2 is where your character has to deal with surviving the obstacles that you put in front of them. **ALL DRAMA IS CONFLICT**. Without conflict, you have no actions; without actions, you have no character; without character, you have no story; without story, you have no screenplay.

ACT 3

Act 3 is approximately 20-30 pages long and goes until the end of the screenplay. It is held together by the *Resolution*. Resolution does not mean ending; resolution means solution. The resolution resolves the story.

MORE DEFINITIONS

Plot Point - Any incident, episode, or event that hooks into the action and spins it around in another direction. They are a major story progression and keep the story line anchored in place. Always a function of the main character. **Plot point I occurs at the end of act I. And plot point II moves the action into act III.**

Dramatic Structure - A linear arrangement of related incidents, episodes, or events leading to a dramatic solution.