

HOW TO WRITE A SCREENPLAY

workbook

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PROTAGONIST

At the heart of every good story is a struggle.

This worksheet will guide you through the first stages of defining that struggle for the main character you create for your very own screenplay.

This main character will be your story's Protagonist. A Protagonist does not necessarily have to be a good person (although typically, most are), only that his challenge serves as the engine of the story.

The most important question to answer when developing a main character is, "What does my Protagonist want?" It's also important to know what will happen if he doesn't get what he wants (this establishes the stakes involved the story) and what internal and external factors are preventing his success.

When creating any character, remember that the more details you can imagine, the better. It's often the minor quirks and small glimpses of humanity that transform a name on paper into a living, breathing personality on screen.

Fill in the various attributes of your Protagonist below.

Name Age Gender

What does your Protagonist love?

What does your Protagonist hate?

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What does your Protagonist fear?

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What does your Protagonist want more than anything? This will be your Protagonist's goal throughout the story and set up the central conflict that will fuel each scene.

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What is your Protagonist's flaw? Your Protagonist's flaw should be an internal block to achieving a goal. Before the end of your story, your Protagonist will have to address this flaw in order to challenge the central conflict.

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What is the worst thing that will happen if your Protagonist doesn't achieve the goal? This will set up the stakes of your story and the consequences of your Protagonist's failure. The more serious the consequences, the better.

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ANTAGONIST

Next, create your **Antagonist**. The Antagonist is the character in your story that is preventing your Protagonist from achieving a goal. Just as your Protagonist's flaw is an internal block to success, the Antagonist acts as the principle external block. Make sure that your Antagonist is as interesting and well-developed as your Protagonist. Developing a good villain can often elevate a movie script from good to great.

Fill in the various attributes of your Antagonist below.

Name Age Gender

What does your Antagonist love?

What does your Antagonist hate?

What does your Antagonist fear?

By what means is your Antagonist actively preventing your Protagonist from achieving a goal?

Next, take everything you know so far about your Protagonist and Antagonist and combine it into a **logline**. A logline is one sentence that distills the essence of your story. The key to writing one is to focus on your Protagonist, his flaw, and the dramatic irony of the central challenge that will test your Protagonist's resolve.

For example, in the Pixar movie *The Incredibles*, the Protagonist is Bob, the father of a family of superheroes. Bob's flaw is that he doesn't work well in a team. His challenge is that after superheroes are outlawed, a supervillain he accidentally created as a result of his poor teamwork has run amok. The Antagonist is the supervillain.

The logline for *The Incredibles* would be something like, "A workaholic superhero forced into early retirement who doesn't know how to work within a team must work with his family of secret supers to defeat a supervillain he accidentally created."

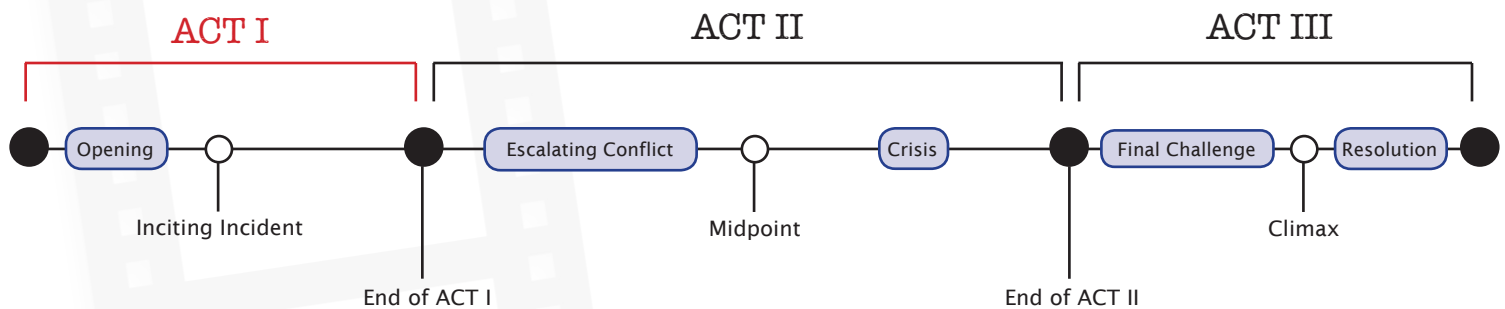
LOGLINE

Write your Logline:

STORY STRUCTURE

Up next: outlining your story! All stories have a beginning, middle and end. Most movies simply take that concept and create three distinct Acts that organize your Protagonist's struggle. Movie scripts are further broken into "beats," or places in the script that are pivotal turning points in the story, such as the presentation of the central challenge or the final battle.

The illustration below is a story map of the most important beats in a story. For an explanation and example of each point on the line below, refer to the following outline of a standard 3-Act story.



OPENING IMAGE: The first thing the audience sees: a visual that establishes your tone and genre and hooks the reader.

EXAMPLE: *Old-fashioned footage of Bob (aka Mr. Incredible), alone, being interviewed about what it's like to be a superhero.*

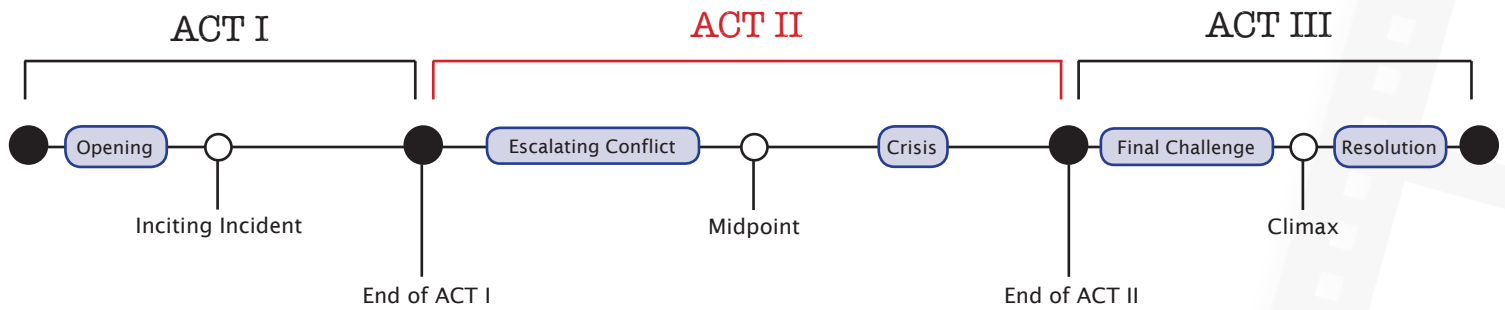
INCITING INCIDENT: The event, problem, invitation, or opportunity that presents the Central Conflict that your Protagonist will have to overcome.

EXAMPLE: *Superheroes are outlawed. Bob is forced into retirement; his whole reason for being is taken away from him.*

END OF ACT I: Your Protagonist makes a proactive decision to face the challenge at hand.

EXAMPLE: *Jobless and disowned by the government, Bob takes a secret assignment that will call upon the hero he was.*

STORY STRUCTURE



ESCALATION: Your Protagonist will attempt to solve the conflict through the easiest recourse available. This will fail and allow countering forces to gain strength.

EXAMPLE: *Bob works as a superhero secretly and lies to his family about his job. Syndrome, the villain, reveals himself.*

MIDPOINT: The stakes increase which force your Protagonist to cross a point of no return. He is more committed to the goal than ever before.

EXAMPLE: *Bob finds out every superhero is being target for elimination, including his wife. Stakes are raised.*

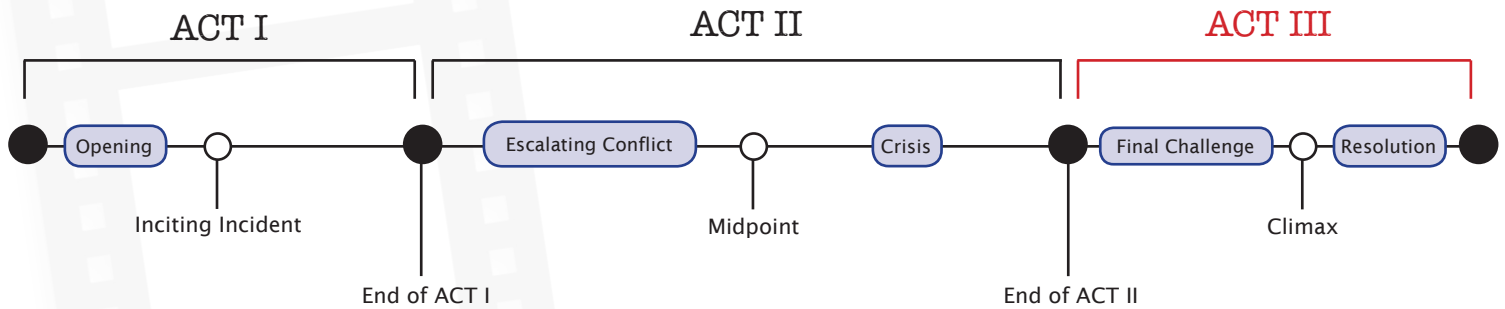
CRISIS: The forces against your Protagonist intensify. Eventually, mounting pressure takes everything away from his worst fears are realized.

EXAMPLE: *Bob is captured. Syndrome blows up a plane, dropping the Incredibles into the ocean. Bob thinks his family is dead.*

END OF ACT II: As a result of the Crisis, your Protagonist gains the proper insight to conquer the problem posed by the central conflict. He decides to act.

EXAMPLE: *Bob reunites with his family. He learns that Syndrome's ultimate plan is to destroy the city. He gathers his family for the final showdown.*

STORY STRUCTURE



FINAL CHALLENGE: This is the head-to-head final confrontation where the Central Conflict will be resolved.

EXAMPLE: *An epic battle begins between the Incredibles and Syndrome. The Incredibles will prove the value of superheroes.*

CLIMAX: The point of highest drama. With the lessons learned during the course of their journey, your Protagonist is able to resolve the Central Conflict.

EXAMPLE: *Syndrome attempts to kidnap the family's baby, who turns out to have superpowers of his own. Syndrome gets blown up.*

RESOLUTION: The resolution ties up the loose ends of the story, giving an idea of where the characters are headed.

EXAMPLE: *The whole family is reunited. A new villain appears. The Incredibles suit up and are back in action.*

What's next? Start writing! Writing is all about rewriting: the best storytellers will constantly edit their outline as they go, adding, removing and shaping plot points and characters to achieve the best fit for their story.

And remember: movie and TV scripts must adhere to a specific Industry standard format. A standard format across all screenplays ensures that the many people involved in making a movie have one, single vision for what should appear on screen. Professional screenwriters use specialized software to accomplish this—a program called **Final Draft** is the most popular and is available through The Writers Store.

For many more tools and resources, including a brief guide on screenplay formatting, please visit The Writers Store website.