

# **Writing Stories for Film**

**THEORY AND PRACTICE  
FROM CONCEPT TO SCREEN**



# OBJECTIVES

1. Explore techniques for **Developing Ideas and Production Concepts.**
2. Organize **Strategically** for writing effective **Stories and Treatments.**
3. Understand the **Dramatic Structure.**
4. Survey the **Creative Process** of writing **Stories and Scripts.**

# **THE IDEA**

**Personal Thoughts & Experiences**

**Events in the News**

**Story Adaptation**

**Copyrighted Material**

**The Public Domain**



# THE CONCEPT

Often called the **Log Line**: a brief summary of a TV/film production providing both a synopsis of the program's plot, and an "hook" to stimulate interest.

## For Example:

Shakespeare struggles to overcome his writer's block by seeking a muse and he discovers true love.

The result: *Shakespeare in Love*

# THE EARLY STAGES OF STORY DEVELOPMENT: The Story Outline

## Part I: Establishing the Company

1. Exterior shots with CEO voiceover
2. Transition to interior interview with the CEO
3. Overlay manufacturing shots over CEO's description

## Part II: Meeting the Employees

1. Interview with Design Team leader (over images of team working)
2. Interview with Production Manager (over images of factory floor)
3. Interview with Quality Control representative (show inspection process)
4. View of packaging and shipping process (with voiceover)

# THE EARLY STAGES OF STORY DEVELOPMENT: The Story Outline

## Part III: Meeting the Customers

1. Interview with regional distributor
2. Interviews with two or three retail customers

## Part IV: Conclusions

1. CEO reiterates major promotional points
2. Montage of employees working and group shot at conclusion
3. Contact information for product orders and plant tours

# THE EARLY STAGES OF WRITING AND STORY DEVELOPMENT

## The Scene Outline

### Mountain Justice Scene Outline

1. INT. COFFE HOUSE — DAY

ARIEL meets KJRSTN and expresses discontent with her life.

2. EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD — DAY

Kjrstn takes Ariel on a scenic drive and points out the things she has been missing.

3. EXT. WATERFALL — DAY

Kjrstn shows Ariel a hidden waterfall down a forgotten trail. Ariel lights up.

4. EXT. COFFEE SHOP — DAY

Kjrstn drops Ariel off at the parking lot. They make plans to meet again.

5. INT. ARIEL'S HOUSE — EVENING

Ariel reaches out to her husband, ROBERT, with simple conversation, but tension hangs in the air.

6. INT. COFFEE SHOP — DAY

Kjrstn and Ariel sit together at a table. Kjrstn asks Ariel if she thinks her husband is having an affair. Ariel admits doubt.

# THE EARLY STAGES OF WRITING AND STORY DEVELOPMENT

## The Scene Outline

### 7. EXT. ARIEL'S HOUSE — NIGHT

Two cars creep down a suburban street. Ariel leads in the first car and shows Kjrstn, who follows, where she lives.

### 8. EXT. CITY STREETS — DAY

Kjrstn follows Robert to work and parks outside his office, watching the door.

### 9. EXT. ROBERT'S OFFICE — DAY

Kjrstn sinks into boredom from the lack of activity, and then springs up when Robert leaves with another woman.

### 10. INT. RESTAURANT — DAY

Kjrstn gives an account to Ariel of Robert's Day. She prepares Ariel and then tells the details of Robert holding hands and disappearing into a hotel with the mystery woman. Ariel is attentive and stoic.

### 11. INT. BAR — NIGHT

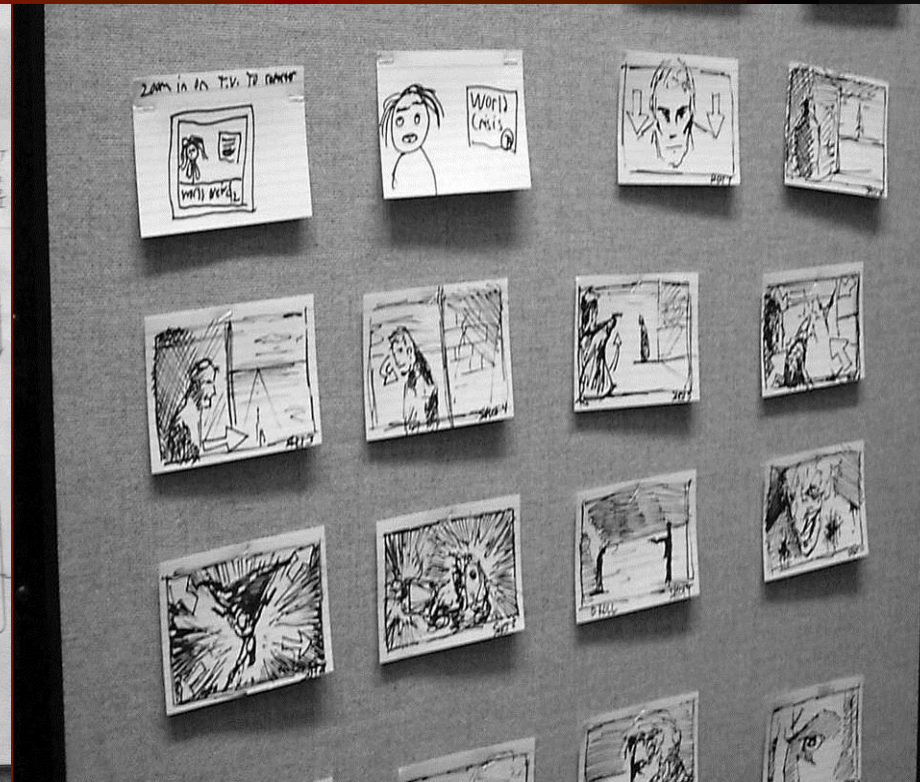
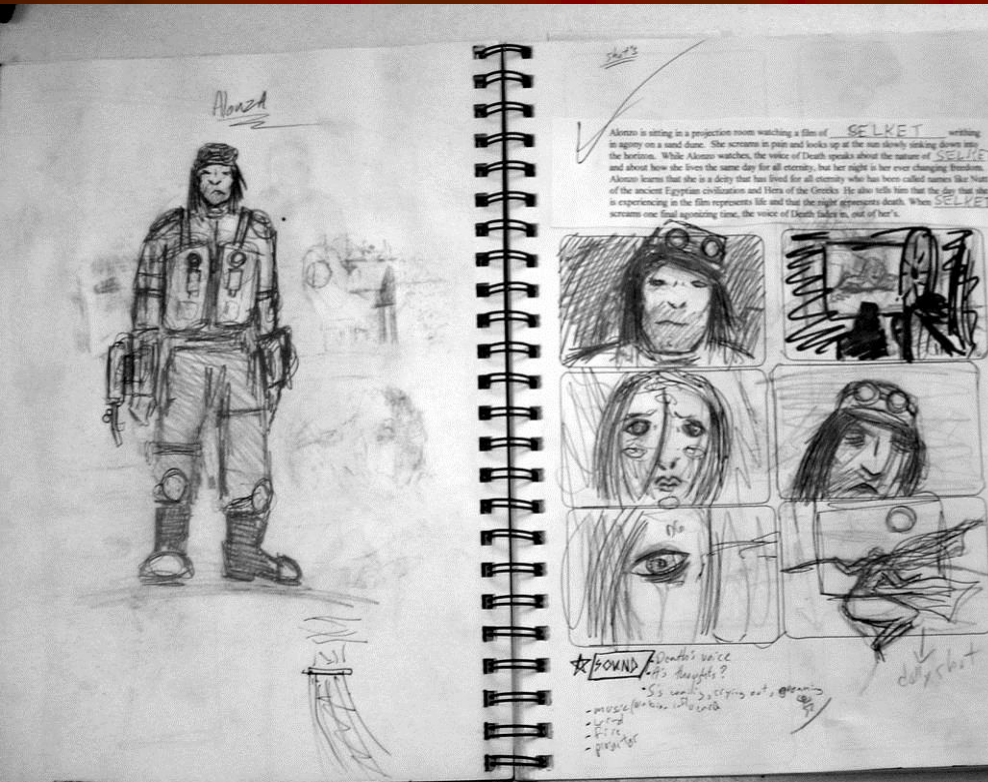
Kjrsten takes Ariel to a bar to shake off the horrible news. Ariel's mood evolves from shock to reckless abandon.



# THE EARLY STAGES OF WRITING AND STORY DEVELOPMENT

## Notebooks

## Bulletin Boards



# THE TREATMENT

A **Treatment** is a summary of a screenplay for a motion picture, TV show, theatrical production, or radio program.

It is written as a **Narrative** of the production and reads like a **Short Story**.

# THE TREATMENT

## WEB OF DECEIT

Inspired by the Tina Yoder Story

Treatment for a Two-Hour Movie

By

Ron Cutler and Barry Weitz

RACHEL CLAYBORNE, 37, is a dedicated pediatrician working with seriously ill children and struggling to save a 5-year-old named LISA, who is ill with a serious blood disease. Rachel lives in Miami, with her husband CHANCE, 40, a dynamic and ambitious District Attorney. Though they have no children, Rachel's eight-year marriage appears both loving and fulfilling.

# THE TREATMENT

Rachel and Chance live in a dynamic atmosphere of financial and political power. Chance is the son of OGDEN CLAYBORNE, 70, an extremely wealthy businessman, landowner and developer as well as a powerful force in Miami's banking and social circles. Ogden is also the major force in his children's lives. He is a benevolent despot, who rules them with an iron hand. This has created internal rivalries within his family, as those around him vie for his attention and influence. Only Chance seems immune from his overbearing hand, due to Rachel's loving support and fierce oft demonstrated independence.

Though extremely vital, Ogden is deeply concerned about his legacy. His overriding ambition is for Chance to become a United States Senator and perhaps even a . . .

# TREATMENT GUIDELINES

- Use **Visual** and **Descriptive Language**.
- Get the reader **Hooked** and **Engaged**.
- Written in the **Present Tense**.
- **Single-Space** format.
- Place **Line Breaks** to show changes in **Time** and/or **Location**.

# THE DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

- **Exposition.** This is where everything is introduced. The characters, the setting, the time, the place, the problem, etc.
- **Inciting Incident.** The conflict that begins the action of the story and causes the protagonist to act. Without this event, there would be no story.
- **Complications.** Rising & Falling Action. The basic conflict is complicated by the introduction of related secondary conflicts, including various obstacles that frustrate the protagonist's attempt to reach their goal.

# THE DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

- **Climax or Crisis.** The climax, or turning point, marks a change, for better or worse, in the protagonist's story. If the story is a comedy, things will have gone badly for the protagonist up to this point; now, the story turns and things will begin to go well for him or her. If the story is a tragedy, the opposite will happen, with things going from good to bad for the protagonist.
- **Resolution.** The comedy ends with a dénouement (a conclusion) in which the protagonist is better off than at the story's beginning. The tragedy ends with a catastrophe in which the protagonist is worse off than at the beginning of the narrative.

# CHARACTERS

- **Protagonist.** The Hero or Main Character(s) of the story. There is often more than one protagonist.
- **Antagonist.** This is the person or persons opposed to, or struggles against, or competes with the Protagonist(s).
- **Ensemble Cast.** An ensemble cast is made up of cast members in which the main actors are given equal amounts of importance and screen time. This is different from productions which focus on 1 or 2 main characters.
- **Supporting Characters.** Individuals in a narrative used to give added dimension or complexity to the story and to move it forward.



# THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF WRITING

- Write your **Ideas** down.
- How do they look after **a few days**?
- Share your work with **Friends** and **Seasoned Writers**.
- Activate the imagination in **Indirect Ways**.
- **Music** is a powerful tool.

# BRAINSTORMING

1. Look at today's news and write **Three Concepts for Stories** based on news articles you review.
2. Write a **1 page Treatment** inspired by your own life's experience. Use the format shown in class. How will you get the reader **Engaged**? Who are the **Antagonists**, and what **Complications** do **You** face? How does the story **End**?
3. Choose one of your favorite films of all time. Identify the **Protagonist(s) and Antagonist(s)**. What is the **Inciting Incident**? What are some of the **Complications**? Is the protagonist **Successful** in his or her journey? What is the **Climax** of the story?

**Use the Template provided to complete this activity.**

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