

## AND NOW ... THE STEP OUTLINE

1. AND FINALLY ... THE STEP OUTLINE
  - a. IT'S A SCENE TO SCENE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR STORY
  - b. "SPINE" IS THE SOUL OF THE SCREENPLAY STRUCTURE
    - i. PROTECT IT
    - ii. IT ANSWERS "WHAT IS IT **REALLY** ABOUT?"
  - c. IN LIFE, ONE THING HAPPENS AFTER THE OTHER. IN STRUCTURE, ONE THING HAPPENS **BECAUSE** OF THE OTHER
    - i. CUT ELEMENTS THAT HAVE LITTLE OR NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR STORY OR BIND THEM INTO YOUR STORY/STRUCTURE/PLOT
    - ii. MAKE SURE THE SCENE YOU'RE IN WAS CAUSED BY THE SCENE BEFORE AND THE FOLLOWING SCENE IS THERE BECAUSE OF THE ONE YOU'RE IN
  - d. REMEMBER ... THE STEP OUTLINE (OR SCENE CARDS) ARE FOR YOUR EYES ONLY
    - i. USE INDEX CARDS, OR BOND PAPER, OR STRIPS OF BUTCHER PAPER
    - ii. WHATEVER WORKS FOR YOU, BUT DO A STEP OUTLINE
  - e. WHAT'S A "STEP"
    - i. ONE SCRIPT PAGE OR LONGER/A SCENE (COMPRISED OF 1 SLUG OR MORE)
    - ii. EXAMPLE:
      1. An alien spaceship lands. E.T. is left behind.
      2. E.T. goes to a suburban home. Little boy having a pizza party.
      3. E.T. connects with the boy.
      4. Boy smuggles E.T. into his suburban home.
    - iii. LENGTH
      1. AVERAGE DRAMA TYPE SHOULD HAVE ABOUT 30 STEPS.
        - a. SOME STEPS WILL BE 5-9 PAGES, SOME 3-4, SOME 1-2. AVG WILL BE 3
        - b. 30 STEPS GIVE YOU ~90 PAGES
        - c. EASIER TO ADD 10 PAGES WHEN YOU ARE WRITING THE SCRIPT THAN SUBTRACT AT THAT PHASE
      2. COMEDY OR ACTION/ADVENTURE SCRIPTS SHOULD HAVE ABOUT 45 STEPS
        - a. PACING WILL DICTATE FEWER STEPS OVER 5 PAGES – MORE 1 AND 2 PAGERS
  - f. DON'T FORGET THE THREE ACTS
    - i. NEED TO KNOW THREE ACT PAGE COUNT STRUCTURE AT THIS POINT
    - ii. ACT 1
      1. THE "SITUATION"
      2. ENDS AT "FLOATING" PAGE 17
      3. APPROX. 4 TO 6 STEPS (17 PAGES / 3 PAGES PER STEP)
      4. COMEDIES/ACTION-ADVENTURES CLOSER TO 10
    - iii. ACT 2
      1. THE "COMPLICATIONS"
      2. "MAYBE" PAGE 85 (COULD BE 70 – 100) – DEPENDS ON THE THIRD ACT

3. APPROX. 18 STEPS
- iv. ACT 3
  1. THE “RESOLUTION”
  2. TAKE IT TO 100-110
  3. APPROX 6 STEPS
- v. ACT 2 AND 3 PAGE COUNTS ARE MORE FLUID – ONLY THE “FLOATING” PAGE 17 IS FIRM
- vi. YOUR JOB IS TO GIVE THE AUDIENCE WHAT THEY SUBCONCIOUSLY WANT
  1. STEP OUTLINE, ACT ENDS AND ANALYTICAL THINKING SHOULD BE DISGUISED
  2. DON’T GET TOO CAUGHT UP BEYOND THE THREE ACT STRUCTURE AND PAGE 17
  3. PROCESS SHOULD BE AS ORGANIC AS POSSIBLE
- g. SCENE DO’S AND DON’TS
  - i. PRIMARY GOAL – PROGRESS THE CHARACTERS AND STORY, KEEPING THE AUDIENCE FROM BOREDOM
  - ii. MAJOR CAVEATS FOR SCENES IN OUTLINE
    1. SITTING DOWN SCENES
      - a. BEWARE – TENDANCY TO BE BORING
      - b. HAVE FEW OF THESE
      - c. MAKE THEM IMAGINATIVE AND MEMORABLE
    2. SURPRISES
      - a. TV AND MOVIES HAVE ALERTED THE AUDIENCE TO THE PREDICTABLE
      - b. BE SURPRISING
      - c. SET UP THE AUDIENCE TO EXPECT ONE THING AND DELIVER ANOTHER
    3. FORESHADOWING
      - a. SETUPS ARE IMPORTANT IN BOTH COMEDY AND DRAMA
      - b. BY FORESHADOWING, YOU CREATE ANTICIPATION
        - i. I.E. PUT A GUN IN A DRAWER AND THE AUDIENCE LEANS FORWARD EVERY TIME A CHARACTER GOES NEAR THE DRAWER
      - c. “BEAR ON THE BEACH”
    4. PAINTED CORNERS
      - a. LOOK TO YOUR CHARACTERS IF YOU PAINT YOURSELF INTO A STORY CORNER
      - b. WHAT WOULD THE CHARACTER DO – THINK OF THE OBVIOUS
      - c. TURN IT 180 DEGREES
        - i. DO SOMETHING UNEXPECTED
- h. LET’S GET STARTED!
  - i. ACT 1 – THE SITUATION
    1. STEP 1
      - a. MYRIAD WAYS TO BEGIN YOUR STORY

- b. MOST IMPORTANT - DO NOT BE BORING
  - c. MOST OFTEN, BEGIN WITH AN EVENT
    - i. SPACESHIP LANDING
    - ii. OUTLAW TRYING TO ROB A BANK
    - iii. SOMEONE BEING KILLED IN FRONT OF A SIGNIFICANT LOCATION
    - iv. A SMALL ABUSED GIRL SLIPPING INTO HYSTERIA
- 2. UNPEEL THE ONION
  - a. STRIP AWAY LAYERS OF STORY AND CHARACTER SCENE BY SCENE
  - b. DON'T BLOW OUT EVERYTHING UPFRONT
  - c. ADDS MYSTERY, TENSION AND SUSPENSE
  - d. ONLY TELL THE AUDIENCE WHAT IT NEEDS TO KNOW
  - e. WITHHOLD AS LONG AS YOU CAN
- 3. PACE YOURSELF
  - a. BE PATIENT
  - b. DON'T RUSH TO SHOW ALL YOUR RESEARCH, INSIGHT AND DRAMA
  - c. PURPOSE – TO LET THE AUDIENCE KNOW THE SITUATION
- ii. ACT 2 – THE COMPLICATIONS
  - 1. TIME TO GET INTO THE BACKSTORY, CHATACTER MYSTERY, SUBPLOTS, ACTION, REACTION, CAUSE & EFFECT – THE COMPLICATIONS
  - 2. DON'T BE –
    - a. TOO COMPLICATED AND BORING
    - b. TOO THIN & UNCOMPLICATED AND BORING
  - 3. OCCASIONALLY PLOTS ARE WILDLY COMPLICATED BUT THE ACTION AND COMEDY CARRIES THE PICTURE – RAMBO & LETHAL WEAPON II
    - a. AUDIENCE HAS SUCH A GOOD TIME THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT ACT 2 TWISTS
    - b. HOWEVER, DON'T RELY ON THIS TECHNIQUE
    - c. THESE FILMS WERE PROBABLY TOO LONG IN THEIR ORIGINAL VERSION AND DEEP CUTS WERE MADE – EXPLANATION SCENES WERE PROBABLY EXCISED
    - d. IN THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD MANY MIDDLE MANAGEMENT PEOPLE ARE MBA'S
      - i. THEY GIVE "LOGIC" NOTES.
      - ii. HENCE, WHEN ALL THE "LOGIC" IS PUT INTO THE SCRIPT AND THE FILM RUNS LONG, THEIR EDITORS AND AUDIENCE TESTS GO FOR THE EMOTION.
      - iii. THAT'S WHY MANY GOOD MOVIES HAVE LOGIC GAPS – BUT A GENERAL AUDIENCE WON'T CARE
    - e. BE MOST ATTENTIVE TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN YOUR "MIDDLES"
      - i. ERR ON THE SIDE OF BEING TOO THIN ON PLOTTING

- ii. EASIER TO ADD TWISTS LATER
- 4. SCENES WITHOUT WORDS
  - a. UNFOLD YOUR SIMPLE, PROFOUND SECOND ACT THROUGH ACTION AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE
- 5. SCENES WITH WORDS
  - a. TIMES WHEN YOUR CHARACTERS “LET IT OUT”
  - b. HONE DIALOGUE WRITING SKILLS
  - c. MINE THE DRAMA
- 6. OBLIGATORY SCENES
  - a. IN ACT 2, SOMEBODY MUST TELL SOMEONE ELSE WHAT IS GOING ON
  - b. TRY TO WRITE “TALK” SCENES WITH INVENTION AND PASSION
  - c. IDENTIFY THEM
  - d. WRITE THEM WITH TWISTS AND INVENTION, USING UNUSUAL LOCALES, DIALOGUE OR TENSION IN COUNTERPOINT
  - e. DISGUISE THESE SCENES
- 7. DISGUISED EXPOSITION
  - a. APPLICABLE TO ALL ACTS
  - b. NOT LITERALLY DONE AT STEP OUTLINE LEVEL, BUT LOOK FOR POTENTIAL PROBLEMS
  - c. USE ACTION OR FALSE ACTION (OPENING DOORS, RIDING IN CARS, WALKING DOWN A HALLWAY)
- 8. MATH ONE MORE TIME
  - a. CALCULATE HOW MANY STEPS YOU NEED FOR ACT 2
  - b. ACT 1 SHOULD BE 6-10 STEPS, ACT 3 SHOULD BE 3-10 STEPS
  - c. ACT 2 SHOULD BE 15 (DRAMA) OR 30 (COMEDY/ACTION) STEPS
- iii. ACT 3 – THE CONCLUSION
  - 1. CLIMAX, RESOLUTION OR CATHARSIS
  - 2. ARISTOTLE – THE EMOTION THAT THE AUDIENCE SHOULD FEEL IN THE THIRD ACT IS CATHARSIS
  - 3. THE STORY BENEATH THE STORY
    - a. ET IN THE SKY, HOMEWARD BOUND
    - b. BUTCH & SUNDANCE IN THE FREEZE FRAME OF IMMORTALITY
    - c. ROSEBUD ON THE BURNING SLED
    - d. MISS JANE PITTMAN TAKING A DRINK FROM THE “WHITES ONLY” FOUNTAIN
    - e. TAKES THREE FORMS – TALK, ACTION OR A COMBINATION
  - 4. ACTION ACT 3
    - a. THE PROTAGONIST TAKES PHYSICAL ACTION
    - b. PLACE FOR EPIC CHASE SCENES
  - 5. TALK ACT 3
    - a. THE PROTAGONIST TAKES VERBAL ACTION
    - b. MOST DIFFICULT
    - c. USING WORDS BASED ON WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

6. THE TALK AND ACTION ACT 3

- a. YOU DON'T HAVE TO TIE UP EVERYTHING AT THE END OF ACT 3
- b. "ICEBOX TALK" – HITCHCOCK
- c. GIVES THE AUDIENCE SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT AFTER THE FILM IS OVER
- d. EXAMPLES:
  - i. ROSEBUD
  - ii. DID RICK GET AWAY
  - iii. DID BUTCH AND SUNDANCE REALLY DIE
  - iv. DID THE KIDS FLY OFF WITH ET OR COME BACK

iv. PROMISE

- 1. OUTLINES DON'T NEED TO BE FUNNY, EXCITING OR FEARFUL
- 2. OUTLINES SHOW THE STRUCTURE OF THE STORY AND HAVE THE PROMISE OF MAXIMUM COMEDY, ADVENTURE OR DRAMA
- 3. A ROADMAP FOR THE JOURNEY
- 4. YOUR PROCESS SHOULD BE SUPPORTIVE OF HOW YOU THINK, ORGANIZE AND WRITE