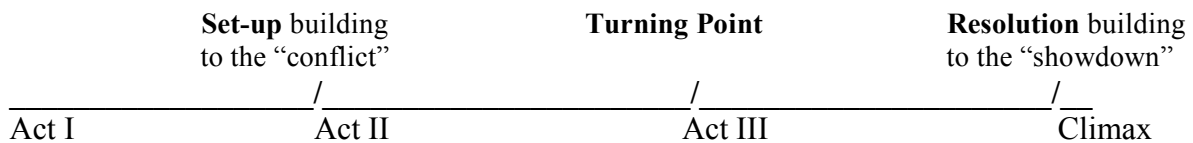


Screenwriting

American motion pictures are **linear storytelling** with very few exceptions, i.e., *Citizen Kane* and *Pulp Fiction*, which tell stories from different points-of-view in a series of flashbacks or flash-forwards.

Linear storytelling follows the simple formula known as melodrama. Like a 3-act play, the story starts with a life altering situation or **conflict** befalling the principal character. This conflict ends Act I, which is known as the **setup**. The situation grows more complicated until events reach a **turning point** for the principal character, ending Act II. The events ultimately move toward a **resolution** at the end of Act III, resulting in a **dramatic climax**, or **showdown**, where everyone is happy, dead, or somewhere in between.



The **principal character**, i.e., **major character**, **Hero**, or "**star**") drives the action. In a linear structure, there is *only one person* at the center of the action. The story is about the principal character's adventures or misadventures and how the conflict affects either him or her.

The **secondary character**, i.e., **antagonist** or **villain**, creates the **setup** for the **principal character**. The **secondary character** does not need to be evil like Dr. No, they can be very charming like Rhett Butler, or sexy and funny like Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like It Hot*. But without the involvement of the **secondary character** life – at least, movie life – would go on as normal and nothing extremely unusual or conflicting would happen to our "**star**."

The **setup** is an adverse situation, or **personal conflict**, that drives the **action**, i.e., "something must happen to the principal character to change the course of his or her life." The **setup** usually occurs roughly 30 minutes into a movie after establishing all the main characters in a "normal situation," at least normal for them. The **setup** or **conflict** is a life-changing problem that the **principal character** cannot simply walk away from but must confront head-on, i.e., take action.

The **turning point** occurs when the **principal character** gets a clue or inspiration on how to change the tide of events. For example, Will Smith in *Enemy of the State* finds the Gene Hackman character, or Scarlett O'Hara swears she will do anything before she goes hungry again. All this leads to a final **resolution** and **dramatic climax**, or final "showdown" to borrow a Western term, like finding the Lost Ark or realizing your Best Friend is not going to marry you after all.

A screenplay *must be written in an exact way* or no one in the industry will read it, thus it will never get produced. The screenplay is a blue print for a movie and the tool for "studio bean-counters" to establish the number of actors, locations, night shots (always very expensive), chases, and special effects. Some of the rules are as follows: Each scene must begin with EXT. (exterior) or INT. (interior), the location, and the time. The first time a character appears, i.e., the actor play that character, THEIR NAME must be in caps. Each time there is a SPECIAL EFFECT, SOUND EFFECT, or CAMERA term, they must be in CAPS.