



Writer's Binder

PRINTABLE WORKSHEETS
FOR PLOTTING AND STORY
DEVELOPMENT

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April 2018 V2

What is a Writer's Binder?

A Writer's Binder is a collection of character and plotting worksheets that help you develop your story before or during the actual writing process. The binder can be electronic or hard copy. In this case, the following worksheets are for a hard-copy binder.

These sheets are inspired by various plotting books. Some of the concepts are mine, but many of the concepts belong to authors of various plotting books. In these cases, the author and book is credited on the sheet.

I'm providing these sheets to you free. However, if you want to thank me, you can join my newsletter at **sierragodfrey.com/signup** if you haven't already. I'll update this writer's binder regularly, and my newsletter is the way to get updates.

How to Use the Sheets

Print out whichever ones you want, as many times as you need. For examples of some sheets, see **sierragodfrey.com/examples**.

Obligatory Disclaimer

While the sheets are my own designs, the content is not always mine. I credit sources where applicable and the content belongs to the creators.

Your use of these sheets indicates that I am not responsible for the content or any problems in a story you may have as a result of these sheets.



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Character Sheets

- * Cast of Characters
- * Character 411
- * Visual Character Guide
- * What's in the Handbag
- * Villains

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Your novel may have a few key characters, or many. Use this sheet to get a handle on them all.

| | Name | Age | Location |
|---------------|------|-----|----------|
| Protagonist | | | |
| Love interest | | | |
| Antagonist | | | |
| Ally/Mentor | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

CHARACTER 411

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| FULL NAME: | |
| NICKNAME AND REASON WHY: | |

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Favorite color and why? | |
| Favorite color and why? | |
| Favorite music and why? | |
| Least favorite music and why? | |
| Food | |
| Favorite book | |
| Expressions (sayings) | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Eyes | |
| Hair | |
| Weight | |
| Body type | |
| Prefers wearing | |
| Skin color | |
| Distinguishing marks | |
| Shape of face | |
| | |
| | |

VISUAL CHARACTER GUIDE

CHARACTER NAME: _____

EYES _____

HAIR _____

SKIN COLOR _____

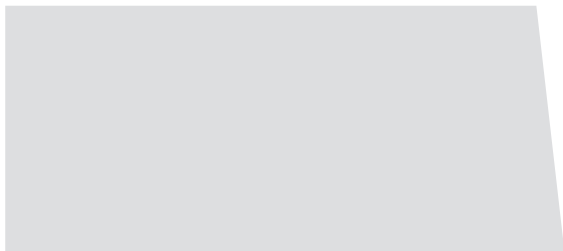
HEIGHT _____

WEIGHT _____

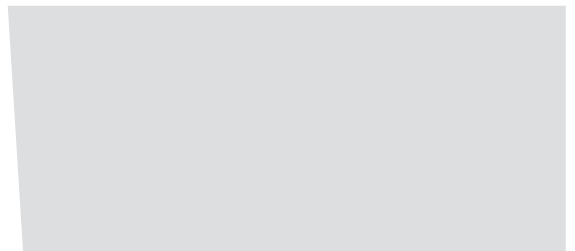
BODY TYPE _____

PREFERS TO WEAR _____

HATES



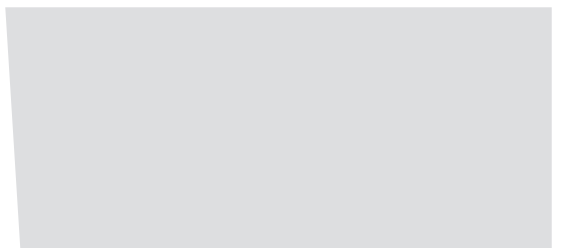
LOVES



WANTS TO



DOESN'T WANT TO



What's in the Handbag?

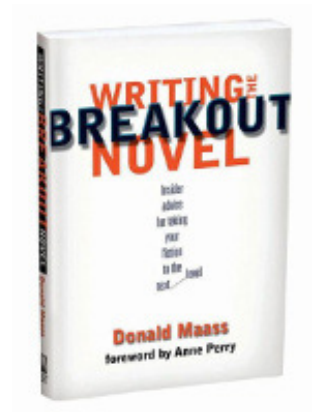
What's in your character's handbag? List all the things. Really think about it. What does your protag carry around? See sierragodfrey.com/examples for an example.

CHARACTER NAME:



VILLAINS

In his book *The Breakout Novelist*, literary agent and author Donald Maas provides several exercises to get your characters going. Below is a modified worksheet from one of his exercises.



Step 1: **Who** is your novel's principal antagonist?

Step 2: What is the **biggest wrong** that your antagonist must do?

List twelve reasons why someone in real life **would not do that**, and would also be prevented by others from doing that.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.

Work out twelve reasons why, in this case, your antagonist **is motivated to do the worst**, and also why others are unable to prevent it.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.

2

Plotting Sheets

- * Act 1 Worksheet
- * Heartbeat Plot Spread
- * Save the Cat
- * Save the Cat 5 Step Finale
- * Protagonist vs. Antagonist Plot Arcs
- * 5 Missions for the Setup
- * 5 Key Turning Points
- * PinchPoints

ACT 1 WORKSHEET

We know in Act 1 of a story that the main character needs to have a reason, a motivation, for kicking off the story. Use this worksheet to help develop that.

SET IT UP

Describe the set up in a sentence. Is there tons of exposition? Is it boring? Is there scenery description? Mentions of the weather that have nothing to do with the character or where she is?

WANT SOMETHING

What does the hero want? It should be apparent immediately. A sense of sadness or anger or anxiety should come through in her words.

TWIST IT

Now that you have the set up, what's the twist to that? What messes up that setting entirely and makes the narrator go, "OMG" and divert paths, even though she doesn't want to?

THE TWIST:

EMBARK

The narrator now goes on to the next act, into another world, into the beyond. Because things have twisted from what she wanted or was worried about, the reader must want to go with the hero.

WHERE IS THE HERO GOING?

| TITLE: | ACT 1 (A) | ACT 1 (B) | ACT 2 (1A) |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| WORD COUNT GOAL: | | | |
| MAIN CHARS: | | | |
| POV: | | | |
| | NOTES | NOTES | NOTES |

| ACT 2 (1 B) | ACT 2 (2A) | ACT 2 (2B) | ACT 3 (A) |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| <div>MIDPOINT</div> | | | |
| NOTES | NOTES | NOTES | ACT 3 (B; RESOLUTION) |
| | | | |

SAVE THE CAT BEAT SHEET

Save the Cat by Blake Snyder is one of the best plotting books around. Although it primarily deals with the screenwriting business, its plotting principles lend themselves perfection to plotting in fiction. The page numbers below assume a 110-page screenplay; use them as percentage guides in a novel. Definitions by Tim Stout (timstout.wordpress.com/story-structure/blake-snyders-beat-sheet).

| BEAT | | APPROX. PAGE | WHAT IT IS | YOURS |
|---------|---|--------------|---|-------|
| ACT 1 | 1. OPENING IMAGE | 1 | A visual that represents the struggle & tone of the story. A snapshot of the main character's problem, before the adventure begins. | |
| | 2. SET UP | 5 | Expand on the "before" snapshot. Present the main character's world as it is, and what is missing in their life. | |
| | 3. THEME STATED | 1-10 | Happens during the Set Up. What your story is about; the message, the truth. Usually, it is spoken to the main character or in their presence, but they don't understand the truth...not until they have some personal experience and context to support it. | |
| | 4. CATALYST | 12 | The moment where life as it is changes. It is the telegram, the act of catching your loved-one cheating, allowing a monster onboard the ship, meeting the true love of your life, etc. The "before" world is no more, change is underway. | |
| | 5. DEBATE | 12-25 | But change is scary and for a moment, or a brief number of moments, the main character doubts the journey they must take. Can I face this challenge? Do I have what it takes? Should I go at all? It is the last chance for the hero to chicken out. | |
| ACT 2 A | 6. BREAK INTO 2 | 25 | The main character makes a choice and the journey begins. We leave the "Thesis" world and enter the upside-down, opposite world of Act Two. | |
| | 7. B STORY | 30 | This is when there's a discussion about the Theme – the nugget of truth. Usually, this discussion is between the main character and the love interest. So, the B Story is usually called the "love story". | |
| | 8. PROMISE OF THE PREMISE/ FUN AND GAMES | 30-55 | This is when Craig Thompson's relationship with Raina blooms, when Indiana Jones tries to beat the Nazis to the Lost Ark, when the detective finds the most clues and dodges the most bullets. This is when the main character explores the new world and the audience is entertained by the premise they have been promised. | |
| | 9. MIDPOINT | 55 | Depending upon the story, this moment is when everything is "great" or everything is "awful". The main character either gets everything they think they want ("great") or doesn't get what they think they want at all ("awful"). But not everything we think we want is what we actually need in the end. | |

SAVE THE CAT BEAT SHEET, CONT.

| | | | | |
|---------|----------------------------|---------|--|--|
| ACT 2 B | 10. BAD GUYS CLOSE IN | 55-75 | Doubt, jealousy, fear, foes both physical and emotional regroup to defeat the main character's goal, and the main character's "great"/"awful" situation disintegrates. | |
| | 11. ALL IS LOST | 75 | The opposite moment from the Midpoint: "awful"/"great". The moment that the main character realizes they've lost everything they gained, or everything they now have has no meaning. The initial goal now looks even more impossible than before. And here, something or someone dies. It can be physical or emotional, but the death of something old makes way for something new to be born. | |
| ACT 3 | 12. DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL | 75-85 | The main character hits bottom, and wallows in hopelessness. The Why hast thou forsaken me, Lord? moment. Mourning the loss of what has "died" – the dream, the goal, the mentor character, the love of your life, etc. But, you must fall completely before you can pick yourself back up and try again. | |
| | 13. BREAK INTO 3 | 85 | Thanks to a fresh idea, new inspiration, or last-minute Thematic advice from the B Story (usually the love interest), the main character chooses to try again. | |
| | 14. FINALE | 85-100 | This time around, the main character incorporates the Theme – the nugget of truth that now makes sense to them – into their fight for the goal because they have experience from the A Story and context from the B Story. Act Three is about Synthesis! | |
| | 15. FINAL IMAGE | 100-115 | Opposite of Opening Image, proving, visually, that a change has occurred within the character. | |

THE FIVE-STEP FINALE

In Blake Snyder's plotting book, *Save the Cat*, he describes the final broken into five points. "Think of every Finale in terms of 'storming the castle,'" he wrote. "This 5-step sequence can be seen in *Gladiator*, *Die Hard*, *Star Wars*, and...in *Enchanted*. But in truth it is the basis of many finales. It doesn't have to be an action hero or involve a castle to work. But it's a quick way to find what your story is really about! ...**All stories are about being touched by the transforming power of the divine**, and the Five-Step Finale is a quick and easy way to synthesize that."



| | WHAT IT IS | EXAMPLE: STAR WARS | YOURS |
|--|--|--|-------|
| STEP 1: GATHERING THE TEAM Plan to storm Castle (85-90) | The hero, and the hero team, come up with a plan to "storm the castle" and "free the princess" who is "trapped in the tower." / At 85 the heroine decides to beat up the bad guy. Then the "old sage" tells her "wisdom"(stuff she didn't know before), which gives her direction. | Luke gathers the rebels around him and they prepare to head off and infiltrate the Death Star, looking for the weak point. | |
| STEP 2: STORMING THE CASTLE Enter the Bad Guys' fort (90-95) | The plan begins. The wall of the castle is breached. The heroes enter the Bad Guys' fort. All is going according to plan. The heroine gets to where she needs to go. | The rebels with all their red and yellow numbers "storm" the Death Star. | |
| STEP 3: HIGH TOWER SURPRISE "It's a trap!" (95-100) | Finally reaching the tower where the princess is being kept, the hero finds... she's not there! And not only that, it's a trap! It looks like the Bad Guy has won. / UH-OH, who let the bad guys in? They weren't supposed to be here! | All the rebels miss shooting the reactor, and either die or have to fly off. Darth Vader appears on the scene and starts chasing Luke down. | |
| STEP 4: DIG DEEP DOWN Dig deep down (100) | The hero now has to come up with a new plan. And it's all part and parcel of the overall transformation of the hero and his need to "dig deep down" to find that last ounce of strength (i.e., faith in an unseen power) to win the day. After getting beaten up a lot, the heroine almost gives in, but decides to give it one last shot (synthesis). | Luke must use the force and guide him to the hole in the Death Star that he'll shoot into. In this way, he has finally relinquished all his resistance to using or indeed even believing in the Force. He relies completely on it. | |
| STEP 5: EXECUTION OF NEW PLAN Final Battle (100-105) | Thinking on the fly, and discovering his best self, the hero executes the new plan, and wins! Princess freed, friends avenged, Bad Guy sent back to wherever Bad Guys go when they are defeated — our hero has triumphed. Hurray! The heroine beat the bad guy! | Luke pushes away his sight thingie, uses the Force, and successfully blows up the Death Star -- phew! Just in time, too! | |

Note: numbers in parentheses are intended to show the general placement of the plot point in a supposed 110-page screenplay. Use a loose adjustment for novels, where your total wordcount is 110 (ex. 80k words is 110).

Adapted from Blake Snyder. <http://www.savethecat.com/todays-blog/the-five-step-finale>

PROTAGONIST VS ANTAGONIST PLOT ARC

Track your plot arcs for the two opposing characters so you can get a quick overview of how they start and how they end in relation to each other's arc. See sierragodfrey.com/examples for an example.

PROTAGONIST

SET UP

RESPONSE

ATTACK

RESOLUTION

ANTAGONIST

5 MISSIONS FOR THE SETUP

These 5 steps are from Larry Brooks' Story Fix. Text has been adapted from his website here: storyfix.com/3-%E2%80%93-five-missions-for-the-set-up-part-1-of-your-story

1

Set a killer hook

- You have 10 or so pages (in general; not all novels obviously) to hook a reader.
- Have something to sink their teeth into.
- Must be visceral, emotional, promises an intense and rewarding experience ahead.
- Tickles us, intrigues us, seduces us.
- Deliver it somewhere in the first 3-4 sentences.

Your hook:

2

Introduce the Hero

- Must enter the story early.
- Need to see her in her pre-plot life.
- We need to recognize something of ourselves in her.
- Most of all, we need to get a sense of what the hero's inner demons are.

What they are doing, what they are pursuing, what their dreams are made of? What is their backstory, what are the worldviews and attitudes and prejudices and fears that define them and hold them back? What are their untapped strengths, their unwitting secrets?

3

Establishing Stakes

- Setup what matters to the hero.
- This will drive the first plot point.

What matters most to your hero?

4

Foreshadowing Events to Come

- Must sense impending change.
- Foreshadow the first plot point and major events.

What change is looming? How does your hero get a whiff of it?

5

Prepare for Launch

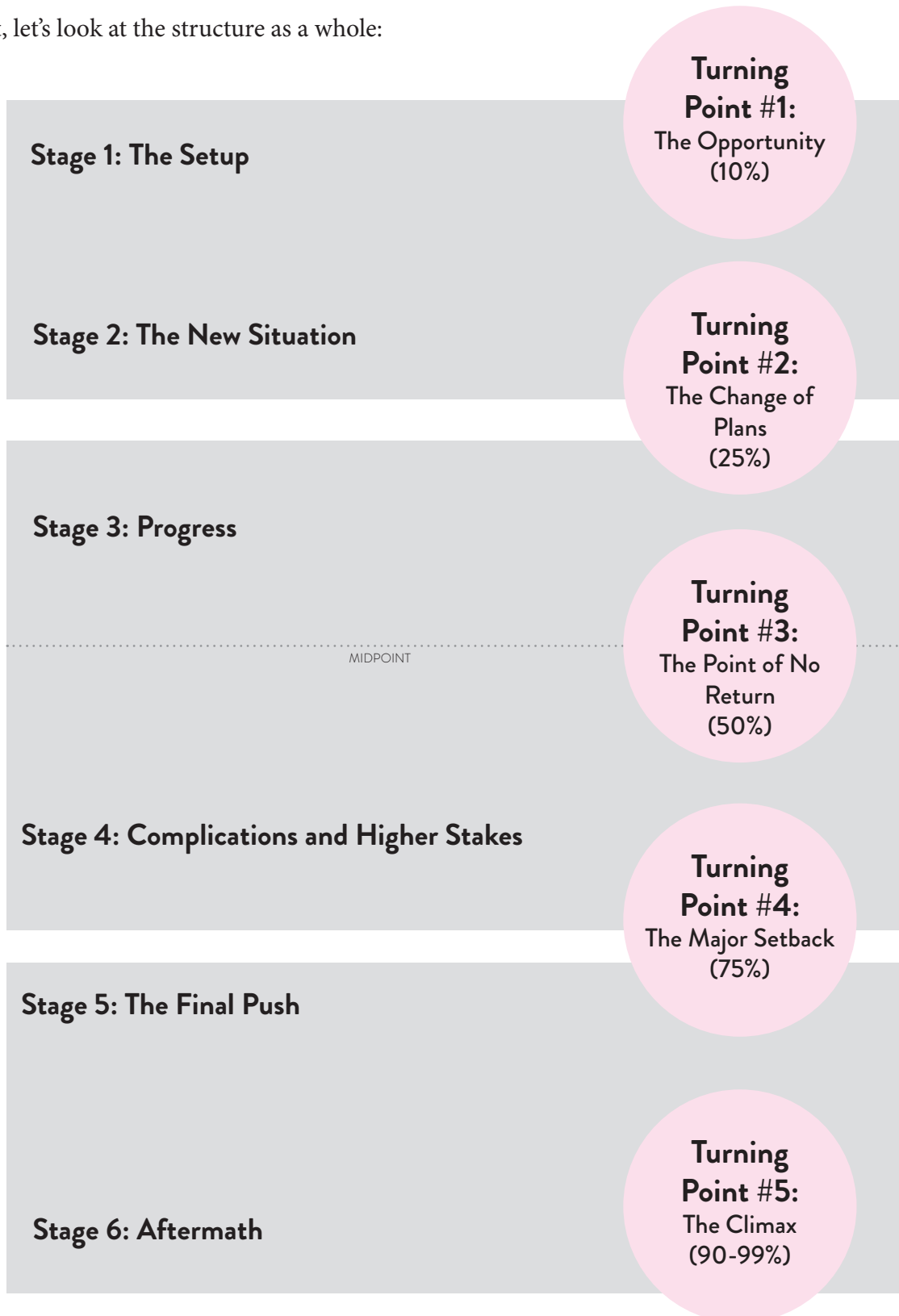
- Pace and focus of these scenes unfold in context to, if not directly pointed at, the first plot point.
- A sense of foreboding or shifting winds to accelerate to the point at which everything changes.

What wind shifts? What is the story pointing to?

5 KEY TURNING POINTS

Michael Hague's StoryMastery.com has a lot of wonderful plotting tips. They're for screenwriters, but they apply just as well for novels. Here is a visual worksheet to his amazing post on 5 Key Turning Points (in your plot). All text is his. storymastery.com/story/screenplay-structure-five-key-turning-points-successful-scripts/

First, let's look at the structure as a whole:



**Turning
Point #1:
The Opportunity
(10%)**

| | What is it? | Yours: |
|------------------------|---|--------|
| Stage 1: The Setup | <p>Ten percent of the way into your story, your hero must be presented with an opportunity, which will create a new, visible desire, and will start the character on her journey. This is the point where Neo is taken to meet Morpheus and wants to learn about The Matrix, or where Ike gets fired and wants to go meet the Run-away Bride.</p> <p>Notice that the desire created by the opportunity is not the specific goal that defines your story concept, but rather a desire to move into stage 2.</p> | |
| Stage 2: New Situation | <p>For the next 15% of the story, your hero will react to the new situation that resulted from the opportunity. S/he gets acclimated to the new surroundings, tries to figure out what's going on, or formulates a specific plan for accomplishing his overall goal: Fletcher has to figure out that he's been cursed to tell the truth in <i>Liar, Liar</i>; and Mrs. Doubtfire devises a plan for seeing (his) children.</p> <p>Very often story structure follows geography, as the opportunity takes your hero to a new location: boarding the cruise ships in <i>Titanic</i> and <i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>; going to Cincinnati to bury his father in <i>Rain Man</i>.</p> <p>In most movies, the hero enters this new situation willingly, often with a feeling of excitement and anticipation, or at least believing that the new problem he faces can be easily solved. But as the conflict starts to build, s/he begins to realize s/he's up against far greater obstacles than s/he realized, until finally s/he comes to...</p> | |

**Turning
Point #2:
The Change of
Plans
(25%)**

| Stage 2: New Situation | What is it? | Yours: |
|------------------------|---|--------|
| | <p>Something must happen to your hero one-fourth of the way through your screenplay that will transform the original desire into a specific, visible goal with a clearly defined end point. This is the scene where your story concept is defined, and your hero's outer motivation is revealed.</p> <p>Outer motivation is my (Hague's) term for the visible finish line the audience is rooting for your hero to achieve by the end of the film. It is here that Tess discovers that Katherine has stolen her idea in <i>Working Girl</i>, and now wants to close the deal herself by posing as a broker. This is what we're rooting for Tess to do, and we know that when she's accomplished this goal (or failed to), the movie will be over.</p> <p>Please don't confuse outer motivation with the inner journey your hero takes. Because much of what we respond to emotionally grows out of the hero's longings, wounds, fears, courage and growth, we often focus on these elements as we develop our stories. But these invisible character components can emerge effectively only if they grow out of a simple, visible desire.</p> | |

**Turning
Point #3:
The Point of No
Return
(50%)**

| | What is it? | Yours: |
|--|--|--------|
| Stage 3: Progress | <p>At the exact midpoint of your screenplay, your hero must fully commit to her goal. Up to this point, she had the option of turning back, giving up on her plan, and returning to the life she was living at the beginning of the film. But now your hero must burn her bridges behind her and put both feet in. (And never let it be said that I can't work two hackneyed metaphors into the same sentence).</p> <p>It is at precisely this moment that Truman crosses the bridge in <i>The Truman Show</i>, and that Rose makes love with Jack in <i>Titanic</i>. They are taking a much bigger risk than at any previous time in these films. And as a result of passing this point of no return, they must now face...</p> | |
| Stage 4: Complications and Higher Stakes | <p>For the next 25% of your story, achieving the visible goal becomes far more difficult, and your hero has much more to lose if he fails. After Mitch McDeere begins collecting evidence against The Firm at that movie's midpoint, he now must hide what he's doing from both the mob and the FBI (complications), and failure will result in either prison or death (higher stakes).</p> <p>This conflict continues to build until, just as it seems that success is within your hero's grasp, he suffers...</p> | |

**Turning
Point #4:
The Major Setback
(75%)**

| | What is it? | Yours: |
|--|---|--------|
| Stage 4: Complications and Higher Stakes | <p>Something must happen to your hero that makes it seem to the audience that all is lost: Carol dumps Melvin in <i>As Good As It Gets</i>; Morpheus is captured in <i>The Matrix</i>. If you're writing a romantic comedy like <i>Working Girl</i> or <i>What Women Want</i>, this is the point where your hero's deception is revealed and the lovers break up.</p> <p>These disastrous events leave your hero with only one option: he must make one, last, all-or-nothing, do-or-die effort as he enters...</p> | |
| Stage 5: The Final Push | <p>Beaten and battered, your hero must now risk everything she has, and give every ounce of strength and courage she possesses, to achieve her ultimate goal: <i>Thelma & Louise</i> must outrun the FBI to reach the border; and the Kennedy's must attempt one final negotiation with the Soviets in <i>13 Days</i>.</p> <p>During this stage of your script, the conflict is overwhelming, the pace has accelerated, and everything works against your hero, until she reaches...</p> | |

**Turning
Point #5:
The Climax
(90-99%)**

| | What is it? | Yours: |
|-------------------------|--|--------|
| Stage 5: The Final Push | <p>Several things must occur at the climax of the film:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the hero must face the biggest obstacle of the entire story • she must determine her own fate • the outer motivation must be resolved once and for all <p>This is the big moment where our heroes go into the Twister and the Jewish factory workers make their escape in <i>Schindler's List</i>.</p> <p>Notice that the climax can occur anywhere from the 90% point to the last couple minutes of the movie. The exact placement will be determined by the amount of time you need for...</p> | |
| Stage 6: The Aftermath | <p>No movie ends precisely with the resolution of the hero's objective. You have to reveal the new life your hero is living now that he's completed her/his journey.</p> <p>In movies like <i>Rocky</i>, <i>Thelma & Louise</i> and <i>The Truman Show</i>, there is little to show or explain, and the writer's goal is to leave the audience stunned or elated. So the climax occurs near the very end of the film. But in most romantic comedies, mysteries and dramas, the aftermath will include the final five or ten pages of the script.</p> | |

PINCH POINTS

Adapted from Larry Brooks' *Story Fix*: Storyfix.com.

What is a pinch point?

Larry Brooks defines it as “an example or reminder of the nature and implications of the antagonistic force, that is not filtered by the hero's experience.” He gives the example from the movie *Top Gun* in which Iceman (Val Kilmer in his prime) corners Maverick (Tom Cruise also in his prime) in the locker room and hisses, “It's not your flying. It's your attitude. You may not like the guys flying with you, they may not like you, but whose team are you on?” This pinch point is a reminder from the antagonist that Maverick is on notice and Iceman is doing the noticing. **Brooks notes that there are only two pinch points in a story.**

WRITE IT HERE:

| | | |
|----------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | THE OPENING OF THE STORY | |
| 2 | A HOOKING MOMENT (IN THE FIRST 20 PAGES) | |
| 3 | A FIRST PLOT POINT (APPROX 20-25%) | |
| 4 | FIRST PINCH POINT | |
| | | |
| 5 | CONTEXT SHIFTING MIDPOINT | |
| WRITE IT HERE: | | |
| 6 | | A SECOND PINCH POINT |
| 7 | | A SECOND PLOT POINT (75%) |
| 8 | | FINAL RESOLUTION |