

YOU GOT THE IDEA, NOW LET'S GET ORGANIZED

1. THE TWO MINUTE MOVIE
 - a. DEVELOPING THE STORY FROM THE IDEA
 - b. BEGIN THINKING IN THREE ACTS
 - c. TRICKS OF THE STORY TRADE
 - i. "VERTICAL" (CHARACTER) AND "LINEAR" (PLOT) STORIES
 1. ALL STORIES ARE A MIXTURE, BUT ONE DOMINATES
 2. VERTICAL – PATTON, CITIZEN KANE, BUTCH CASSIDY & THE SUNDANCE KID, DOG DAY AFTERNOON
 - a. PROTAGONISTS AFFECT THE EVENTS
 3. LINEAR – CASABLANCA, E.T., THE GODFATHER, GONE WITH THE WIND, DOCTOR ZHIVAGO, WIZARD OF OZ
 - a. EXTERNAL EVENTS AFFECT THE PROTAGONISTS
 - ii. DRAMA OR MELODRAMA
 1. MELODRAMA
 - a. GUNS ARE AVAILABLE TO SOLVE THE CHARACTERS PROBLEMS
 - b. NEARLY ALWAYS HAVE CHASE SEQUENCES
 2. DRAMA
 - a. MORE REALISTIC – THE ILLUSION OF HONESTY
 - b. LOTS OF WRINKLED FOREHEADS
 - iii. REALISTIC AND NON-REALISTIC COMEDY
 1. REALISTIC – ODD COUPLE, CHEERS, MANY WOODY ALLEN MOVIES
 2. NONREALISTIC – I LOVE LUCY, LAVERNE AND SHIRLEY, GET SMART, GHOSTBUSTERS
 - iv. COMBINING DRAMA, MELODRAMA, COMEDY, REALISM AND NON-REALISM
 1. DIFFICULT TO DO WELL
 2. EXAMPLES: CASABLANCA, DOG DAY AFTERNOON, BUTCH AND SUNDANCE
 3. EITHER A BLOCKBUSTER OR "YO-YO" PICTURE
 - v. BELIEVABLE UNBELIEVABILITY
 1. SCREENWRITER BILL WALSH – "AN AUDIENCE MUST BELIEVE IN AND CARE ABOUT YOUR LEAD CHARACTERS OVER THE UNSPOOLING OF THE FIRST REEL OF THE MOVIE. IF THEY TRULY BELIEVE, YOU CAN TAKE THEM ANYWHERE IN FANTASY. THEY CAN BELIEVE IN NANNIES WHO FLY WITH THE AID OF THEIR UMBRELLAS. THEY'LL BELIEVE IN LITTLE VW BUGS WITH HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS, A BOY WHO TURNS INTO A SHAGGY DOG, EVEN A MAGICAL SUBSTANCE CALLED 'FLUBBER'."
 2. THERE IS A THIN STRAND BETWEEN AUDIENCE AND SCREEN – BELIEVABILITY
 3. CREATE THE ILLUSION OF BELIEVABILITY
 - vi. AUDIENCE CARING
 1. THEY MUST CARE ABOUT YOUR CHARACTERS

2. DEVELOP THE STORY SO THE CARING STARTS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND CONTINUES THROUGH “FADE OUT”
 3. IRWIN ALLEN – THE BIG CIRCUS – MOVE TIGHTROPE WALK FROM 19 TO 49
- vii. OPEN OR CLOSED STORIES
1. “OPEN” STORIES – AUDIENCE KNOWS WHAT’S GOING ON
 2. “CLOSED” STORIES – AUDIENCE LEARNS ABOUT THE ANTAGONIST AS THE PROTAGONIST LEARNS.
 3. AUDIENCES MORE CLOSELY IDENTIFY WITH THE HERO(INE) IN “CLOSED” STORIES. GIVES THEM THE ILLUSION THAT THEY ARE THE CHARACTERS
 4. VERY IMPORTANT IN MYSTERY GENRE
- viii. FOURTH WALLS AND FLASHBACKS
1. AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION WITH CHARACTERS IS THE MAIN REASON WHY FLASHBACKS, FLASHFORWARDS AND NARRATION ARE GENERALLY UNDESIREABLE AS STORYTELLING DEVICES
 2. THEY CALL ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT THEY ARE WATCHING A MOVIE.
- ix. RED HERRINGS
1. MISDIRECTION
 2. “SETTING SOMETHING UP ON ONE PAGE, PAYING IT OFF ON ANOTHER.”
 3. MEANS OF SURPRISING AN AUDIENCE
 4. ALMOST ALWAYS USED IN MURDER MYSTERIES
- x. TIME LOCKS
1. WAY IN INJECT URGENCY INTO THE STORY THAT CAN GIVE IT ADDITIONAL DRIVE TO HEIGHTEN AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT AND ANXIETY
 2. EXAMPLES: HIGH NOON (BAD GUYS ARRIVE AT NOON), RUN SILENT, RUN DEEP (ONLY AN HOUR’S WORTH OF AIR), AMERICAN GRAFFITI (EVERYONE GOES OFF TO COLLEGE TOMORROW MORNING), LOVE STORY (LOVER HAS ONLY SO MANY DAYS TO LIVE)
- xi. TELESCOPING TIME
1. STORY TIME – GENERATIONS (DOCTOR ZHIVAGO, PASSAGE TO INDIA) TO ‘RUNNING TIME’ (ROPE)
 2. COMPRESS STORY TIME AS MUCH AS LOGICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY POSSIBLE FOR THE AUDIENCE
 3. YOUR CHARACTERS SHOULD ONLY HAVE ONLY SO MUCH TIME TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT YOU FORESHADOWED THEY NEED TO ACCOMPLISH
 4. TRUNCATING TIME GIVES THE AUDIENCE A SENSE OF URGENCY AND ENERGY
- xii. STORYTELLING EXAGGERATION
1. GO FOR EXTREMES
 2. AUDIENCES IDENTIFY WITH THE BEST, NOT THE CHARACTERS THAT ARE JUST OK

3. PUSH EXTREMES – THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOMEONE TO HELP YOU DULL IT DOWN
 4. YOU PROBABLY WILL CATCH YOUR DRAMATIC OVERSTATEMENT WITH YOUR PERSONAL, AS HEMMINGWAT SAID, “BULLSHIT DETECTOR”.
- d. PLOTTING OUT THE TWO MINUTE MOVIE
- i. BEST WAY TO CONSCIOUSLY DEVELOP THE IDEA
 - ii. TWO PAGES, DOUBLE SPACED – NO MORE NO LESS
 1. WHY NOT ONE PAGE?
 - a. NOT SPECIFIC ENOUGH
 - b. LACK DETAIL – CAN’T SEE THE FLAWS
 2. WHY NOT THREE PAGES?
 - a. FORCE YOU TO BE TOO SPECIFIC
 - b. TOO MUCH DETAIL – INHIBITS OPENNESS TO ADDITIONAL THOUGHT
 - iii. SHOW THE COMPLETED TWO PAGES TO CAREFULLY CHOSEN FRIENDS
 - iv. DON’T BE AFRAID OF THE WASTEBASKET, BUT DON’T BE TOO QUICK TO DISCARD YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS
 1. FIRST IMPRESSIONS ORIGINATE FROM YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS, THE BEDROCK OF CREATIVITY
 2. TOO MUCH ‘LOGIC’ CAN LEAD YOU TO ‘DULL’
 - v. STARTING THE PROCESS
 1. MAKE NOTES WHEREVER THEY STRIKE YOU
 - a. THE VOICE RECORDER ON A CELL PHONE IS A GOOD TOOL
 - b. TRANSCRIBE THEM
 - c. CHARACTERIZE THEM – CHARACTER TICS, DIALOGUE, SCENES, MAJOR PLOT POINTS, ETC
 2. MAIN CHARACTERS
 - a. DECISIONS SHOULD SUPPORT CHARACTER TRAITS
 - b. USE PEOPLE YOU KNOW FOR TRAITS, ATTITUDES, ETC TO BUILD CHARACTER
 - c. NAMES SHOULD SUPPORT CHARACTER TRAITS (BUT NOT IN AN OBVIOUS WAY – DON’T NAME YOUR HERO “GOODFELLOW STRONGHEART”, BUT MAYBE “JAMES HARDEN”
 - i. JAMES – SLIGHTLY FORMAL, A LITTLE OLD FASHIONED (NOT JIM OR JIMMY)
 - ii. HARDEN – TOUGHNESS, SCOTTISH ORIGIN – HARDY, BRAVE, STRONG
 - d. EVERYTHING MUST SERVE MAJOR CHARACTERS AND STORY – LOCALE, VOCATIONS, AUTOMOBILES, SHAVING LOTION, PERFUME ...
 - e. REMEMBER ANTAGONISTS DON’T HAVE TO BE HUMAN
 - i. EXAMPLES: MADNESS, CLASS, RACE, PRIDE, TIME
 3. LOCATIONS
 - a. MAKE SURE THEY SERVE THE STORY

4. THE BEGINNING
 - a. DEFINE THE “NOW”
 - b. GET YOUR CHARACTERS “UP A TREE”
 5. THE MIDDLE
 - a. “THROW ROCKS AT THEM”
 - b. ESTABLISH THE COMPLICATIONS
 - c. MORE CHARACTERS
 6. THE END
 - a. WHAT KIND OF ENDING
 - i. EXTREMELY HAPPY OR EXTREMELY SAD
 - b. WANT TO EVOKE EMOTION IN AUDIENCE
 - c. YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FIELD IN WHICH YOU HAVE SET YOUR STORIES
 - d. BE AUDIENCE FULFILLING – LET THEM IDENTIFY WITH THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE – MAXIMUM AUDIENCE IMPACT
- vi. WRITE ON!!!
1. WAIT UNTIL ALL THE RESEARCH IS IN BEFORE YOU START TO BUILD YOUR STORY
 2. PICK A TITLE THAT REPRESENTS THE STORY – YOU CAN ALWAYS CHANGE IT LATER
 3. USE ABOUT ½ PAGE FOR ACT 1 (THREE PARAGRAPHS), A FULL PAGE FOR ACT 2 (FIVE OR SIX PARAGRAPHS) AND ½ PAGE FOR ACT 3 (TWO OR THREE PARAGRAPHS)
 4. READ THE “TWO MINUTE MOVIE EXAMPLE”
- vii. GETTING IT RIGHT
1. DO YOU STILL LIKE THE TITLE?
 2. LOOK FOR EXAMPLES OF WRITER TAP-DANCING
 3. QUESTION YOUR STORY ... QUESTION YOUR CHARACTERS
 4. FLESH OUT DETAILS
 5. KNOW YOUR STORY’S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES
 - a. IF YOU PUT HORSESHIT IN A PIE SHELL, COVER IT WITH WHIPPED CREAM AND TOP IT WITH A CHERRY, IT’S STILL HORSESHIT
 6. DO YOU HAVE A SIMPLE, DRAMATICALLY ASCENDING STORY LINE?
 - a. GENERALLY, AUDIENCES WANT COMFORTABLE STORY LINES
 - b. ORIGINALITY AND CREATIVITY COME FROM THE SURPRISING TWISTS AND TURNS ALONG COMFORTABLE, STRAIGHT STORY LINE
 7. WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT, ALFIE?
 - a. THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS:
 - i. THEME
 - ii. STORY
 - iii. CHARACTERIZATION
 - iv. STRUCTURE

- b. WHAT IS THE UNDERLYING UNIVERSAL THEME?
 - i. ANSWERS THE REAL QUESTION, “WHAT’S IT ABOUT?”
 - ii. CLEARLY ARTICULATE IT
 - iii. REWRITE THE STORY IF NECESSARY TO CLARIFY
 - iv. MAKE THE THEME DECIPHERABLE, BUT DON’T WHACK THE AUDIENCE OVER THE HEAD WITH IT
 - c. THEME IS THE VEIN OF GOLD YOU MUST STRIKE IN YOUR STORY
 - 8. **NOW**, DO YOU STILL LIKE THE TITLE?
 - e. THE CHARACTER OF YOUR CHARACTERS
 - i. REVIEW EGRI FILES
 - ii. SEMINAL AMERICAN MOVIES HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON
 - 1. IT’S NOT GENRE, BUDGET, OR EVEN GOOD STORIES
 - 2. BUT MEMORABLE CHARACTERS
 - iii. DEEPLY DEVELOP THE CHARACTER OF YOUR CHARACTERS
 - 1. KNOWING THEIR SOUL IS PARAMOUNT
 - 2. EXAMPLES OF CHARACTER SKETCHES
 - a. MRS. NIELSON, at age sixty-four is slightly plump and uncomfortable. If she sits too long she swells. If she stands too long she urinates. A widow of ten years, she lives on the ground floor of her daughter’s tenement house. Memories of the Park Street house in New York, Judy’s first steps, John’s promotion, remind Mom of how quickly time passes. Each Sunday, however, she thanks the Lord for these memories. It’s been one year since her cancer operation and she faces “THE ILLNESS” with dignity, concealing it from others and fighting for optimism. But GOD what she’d give to feel well again. She hates all the fuss her daughter goes through. JUDY helps, though; when depression sets in, she brings Mom to exercise class and they shop together. The illness has given Mom a certain wisdom, an insight that shows in her eyes. She understands the importance of a good family life and is proud of Judy, a symbol of her successful upbringing.
 - b. MRS. JUDSUN, a thin, wrinkled, divorced forty-eight-year-old schoolteacher, knows damn well what problems are. She hates haircuts; they’re always too short. She believes her bleached blonde hair and base makeup make her appear covergirllesque. Still rolling in her sleep, thinking how she never should have been cut from her high school cheering squad, she knows everything and nothing is right. She blames her doctor for her problems. Ever since her last pap smear she’s been discharging and she’s convinced that her low voice is the result of the hormones he’s been giving her. Trying desperately to busy herself, she feels there’s not enough time in a day and always butts into the ten items or less line when she shops for the

week. Growing up, Mom and Dad always paid more attention to her older sister, Sara. She was the captain of her girl's gymnastics team. She was the one who married the doctor. Daddy never touched Sara in her sleep.

3. DO THIS BEFORE YOU START YOUR STEP OUTLINE

iv. HEAVIES AND HEROES

1. ANTAGONIST/PROTAGONIST

2. HEAVY

- a. DON'T MAKE THE HEAVY TOO WEAK
- b. IF WEAK, IT WON'T BE MUCH OF AN ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR THE HERO TO OVERCOME HIM
- c. "UNITY OF OPPOSITES"
 - i. MAKE THE VILLAIN STRONG, SENSIBLE, PERSUASIVE
 - ii. THE MORE POWERFUL THE ANTAGONIST, THE GREATER THE VICTORY FOR THE PROTAGONIST
- d. CAN BE HUMAN OR NOT (DISEASE, NATURAL DISASTER, ETC)
- e. DAVID AND GOLIATH EXTREMES
- f. HEAVY AS MONSTER
 - i. IF A BANK ROBBER, HAVE HIM SHOOT AN OLD LADY'S DOG ON THE WAY IN
- g. CAN HAVE A COMBINED HERO/HEAVY
 - i. CHARLES FOSTER KANE
 - ii. TRAVIS BICKLE
 - iii. WILLIE LOMAN
 - iv. MACBETH

3. FLAWED HEROES

- a. EVERY HERO SHOULD HAVE A FLAW
- b. BEST FLAW IS OBSESSION
 - i. HERO SHOULD WANT SOMETHING SO BADLY THAT HE/SHE WILL BATTLE ANY EQUALLY OBSESSED HEAVY AGAINST ALL ODDS
 - ii. HERO MUST HAVE SOMETHING AT STAKE
 - iii. CAN'T JUST WALK AWAY FROM THE PROBLEM

4. DON'T SPLIT YOUR HEROES AND HEAVIES

- a. "ONE SHARK IS WORTH TWO BARRACUDAS."
 - i. TWO VILLAINOUS CHARACTERS CANCEL EACH OTHER OUT
 - ii. REDUCES THE POWER OF THE THREAT
 - iii. CAN HAVE HENCHMEN
- b. ONLY ONE HERO
 - i. EXAMPLE: BUTCH & SUNDANCE – BUTCH IS PROTAGONIST, SUNDANCE IS HIS HENCHMAN
 - ii. IN ALL "BUDDY" PICTURES, ONE IS DOMINANT – LEATHAL WEAPON, LAST BOY SCOUT

- 5. MOTIVATE
 - a. CLASSIC HUMAN HEAVY HAS ONE OF TWO MOTIVATIONS – POWER OR GREED
 - i. VILLAINY EMANATES FROM THESE MOTIVES
 - b. EVERY HERO SHOULD HAVE ONE CONSUMING MOTIVATION
 - i. TO OVERCOME AN OBSTACLE
 - ii. HEROES ARE BOTH MORE BLAND AND MORE COMPLEX THAN HEAVIES
 - c. EVERY CHARACTER, NO MATTER HOW EVIL, IS NOT WITHOUT THEIR GOOD SIDE – THEY HAVE GOOD REASONS FOR BEHAVING AS THEY DO
- 6. LOUSY AND EXCITING HEROES AND HEAVIES
 - a. BAD – ARCHITECTS, PAINTERS, SCULPTORS, ACTORS AND **WRITERS**
 - i. NON-JOBS
 - ii. ARTISTS AND DRAMA
 - 1. THEIR WORK HAPPENS IN THE MIND
 - 2. THEREFORE, GESTATING IS NORMALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO DRAMATIZE
 - iii. THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS BUT THE AUDIENCE HAS A HARDER TIME IDENTIFYING WITH THEM
 - b. GOOD – DOCTORS, LAWYERS, BLUE COLLAR WORKERS, INDIAN CHIEFS ...
 - c. PUT PEOPLE IN AN EXCITING ARENA
 - i. THINK OF PROFESSIONS THAT HAVE EXCITING VISUALS