

PART 2: THE STORY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 3 - Essential Elements of Drama

Duality and conflict:

- Conflict is at the heart of drama.
- The clash of values or temperaments is the stuff of drama.
- If drama is to be about people trying to get or do things, there must always be obstacles, difficulties, and unforeseen consequences, just as in life. This is conflict.
- Conflict does not have to be something negative; we learn through solving problems, and every problem involves solving conflicts: “Fire is the test of gold; Adversity of strong men” (Seneca 4 B.C.–A.D. 65).
- The core of every interesting personality is in his or her conflicts and “unfinished business.”
- Every credible person and situation contains contradictions and opposites— an actor playing a “bad” character must find the good in him, and if playing a good character, must find his weaknesses.
- There are immediate objectives and life time objectives.
- External goals often reflect internal life needs.
- The obstacles a character faces can be external or internal or both.
- Character objectives faced with obstacles require action, and action reveals character. This is the basic engine of drama.
- Characters are developed and revealed through their actions and behavior.
- Like yourself, cinema audiences are drawn to the ambiguities in their own lives and not to other people’s certainties.
- Representation and typifying can lead to flat characters unless you create interestingly ambiguous characters. In melodrama, however, characters tend to have one assigned characteristic and stand either for good or bad.
- The consequences of success or failure, action or inaction, constitute the stakes.
- Stakes might be relatively small in the scheme of things, but must always be high for your character.

Chapter 4 - Shaping the Story into Drama

- Recognize the crisis in any scene.
- Find the beats in that scene and relate them to the characters' objectives and strategies.
- Recognize the contribution complications make to the development of dramatic tension.
- Recognize dramatic development and arcs on the scene level, the individual act level, and the full story structure level.
- Recognize dramatic units and look for evidence of change and development in the story and in particular characters.
- Have you made all the characters' internal struggles visible through their actions?
- Does the script provoke compelling questions and the need to know more in the audience?

Chapter 5 - Plot, Time, and Structure

- Is the order in which events are organized and told (the plot) optimal?
- Is cause-and-effect clear and forceful in the main character's journey?
- Does the story flow or does it have holdups, stumbles, and unnecessary repetitions?
- Is the tale character driven or plot driven?
- Do you know why you have started your story at this particular moment rather than one hour, one day, or one week earlier or later?
- How does your beginning relate to your ending?
- Is the progression of time handled optimally in terms of point of view and storytelling objectives?
- Is parallel storytelling called for?
- How would you characterize your story's structure in relation to its theme?
- What is the premise or concept underlying the story?
- What screen time is appropriate for your story's narrative and thematic content?
- "Do I have an up-to-date premise or concept so I am can be sure of my movie's thematic purpose?"