Traditional Story Structure always contains a clear beginning, middle, and end and it's these three story structural elements that progress in 3 Acts with the following definitions:

**Act I** is all Setup. **Act II** is Confrontation. **Act III** is Resolution.

Screenplays used to be 120 pages but as with everything, page count has gotten shorter with 110 pages being the new 120. It's not a rule you can't break but it is a rule you need to be mindful of.

**ACT I TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS**

**Act I Setup**: Occurs from page 1 to approximately page 28. The setup gives us the direction of your story. In order to keep ACT II problems to an absolute minimum, it's imperative that you set up Act I with all the information we need to get your story rolling. Act I is where you accomplish defining the following structural elements:

- **Genre**
- Introduce your **Protagonist**
• Introduce your main characters
• Show us what's missing from your Protagonist's life
• Establish your Protagonist's world and his or her day to day routine or way of life
• Give us a clear idea of the mood, atmosphere, scope, and tone of your story
• Include relevant history or backstory of your Protagonist
• Establish your inciting incident
• Give us at least a glimpse of your Antagonist

Very often, it makes sense to begin Act I with a strong image... A strong image can give us a very good sense of world, atmosphere, mood, scope, tone, and sometimes even your theme.

The inciting incident is the hook or catalyst that draws us into your story. The central question of your story hasn't evolved yet but your inciting incident is what makes us want to know what happens next. It's usually an exciting scene or scenes early in your story that not only grabs our interest and "hooks" us, but sends your Protagonist off in a completely new direction! Could be an action, event, situation or even dialogue.

This is where you throw a serious problem at your Protagonist. A problem that only has to be important to his character and remember, this structural element is responsible for driving your story from this point on so be sure to get it right. Ask yourself the following questions... What's at stake? Why should we care? Once you've established your Protagonist's character to us, we'll understand that the problem pertains to him or her.

Never be afraid to make things extremely terrible for your Protagonist. Ask yourself, "What is the worst thing that could happen to my Protagonist?" Ask yourself this question based on the character you've presented to us. Performing research about what the character does for a living, hobby, etc. will give you ideas of the kinds of problems you can throw at him or her. Always remember to raise the action and increase the stakes.

Introduce the rest of your main characters as soon as possible and any supporting characters that will push your story forward while being mindful to keep your cast of characters to an amount needed to tell your story. The more main characters you have, the more difficult it will be for your reader to follow them and not get confused. Consider combining two or more characters into one overall character whenever appropriate.

Be sure to give us at least a glimpse of your Antagonist. Introduce your Antagonist by actually showing him or her to us or something they've done... The aftermath of their character. You can even give us a glimpse of your Antagonist by inference or characters simply talking about him or her.

Your first Plot point – also known as a Turning Point is when your story twists and takes us into a completely new direction, making us wonder what's going to happen next. Your first Plot Point normally happens somewhere between pages 25 and 30 – toward the end of Act I and lulls your Protagonist into Act II voluntarily.

Plot point one needs to accomplish the following:

• Reverse the action into a new direction
• Force your Protagonist to make a choice but voluntarily proceed into Act II even though risk is involved
• Once again make us wonder and ask ourselves if your Protagonist will succeed
• Increased stakes i.e., higher risk, seemingly insurmountable obstacles, higher reward if successful
**Act II Confrontation**: Occurs from approximately page 28 to approximately page 83. This is where problems for your Protagonist intensifies and you throw seeming insurmountable obstacles in his or her way, causing your Protagonist to change direction and try another approach. These obstacles stop your Protagonist briefly until he or she figures out and decides what action to take next.

At this point in your story, complications create anticipation in the reader and builds suspense. Act II takes up half of your entire story so you'll need more than one to keep us anticipating what happens next. For some screenwriters, Act II is the hardest act to write. This usually happens because the screenwriter runs out of new complications and seemingly insurmountable obstacles for his or her Protagonist.

Act II is also where your Protagonist thinks he or she has achieved their goal i.e., defeated the Antagonist however, this false success is short-lived. Follow up this false success with a reversal thus, making your Protagonist realize he or she still has a lot of work to do.

Reversals happen in a variety of ways including the following:

- New information comes into play
- A new situation takes place
- A character turns on your Protagonist
- Helpers and friends give up on your Protagonist and leave him or her alone
- What your Protagonist thought was the truth is now seen as a lie
- Your Antagonist might be a false antagonist and now your Protagonist realizes they've been after the wrong antagonist

In Act II, you should strive to keep pushing your Protagonist's goal a little further out of reach... To the point where he or she seems all is lost and maybe even considers giving up completely:

- Make the conflict personal to your Protagonist
- Let your Protagonist fail more than once
- Allow your Antagonist to succeed at least once and maybe several times
- Test your Protagonist's current abilities and or expertise
- Teach your Protagonist a new skill
- Further explore subplot(s)
As you can see in the image above, there's a new Plot Point right before the end of Act II or approximately page 80. This Plot Point once again consists of a twist that provokes the beginning of a new act or in this case, Act III. The difference in this Plot Point as opposed to the first Plot Point in Act I is that in this Plot Point, it's usually best to force your Protagonist into making a decision that propels him or her into Act III.

Now, depending on the kind of story you're writing... Either a “Protagonist succeeds” story or “Protagonist fails” story, one of two things should happen to your Protagonist:

- If your Protagonist is going to succeed, this is where he or she decides to keep going
- If your Protagonist is going to fail, this is where you've sealed his or her fate by making the wrong decision

### ACT III TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS

**Act III Resolution:** Occurs from approximately page 83 to page 110. This is where you are going to force your Protagonist to face one last major obstacle. This obstacle should test your Protagonist's faith, resolve, character, and even his or her endurance. Push your Protagonist to his or her limit both physically and emotionally!

This is where your Protagonist sets up your Antagonist to be beaten or destroyed. At this point, your Protagonist is going to do “whatever it takes” to succeed and achieve his or her goal.

If however, you're writing a tragedy... Where your Protagonist fails, this is where your Antagonist or Antagonistic Forces come in and do away with your Protagonist.

This is where your climax takes place and where the central question of your story is finally answered... Does your Protagonist succeed or does your Protagonist fail? Either way, this is where your Protagonist comes face to face with your Antagonist or Antagonistic Forces. The climax usually happens pretty fast or is at least fast-paced.

Finally... Your Resolution. Be sure you've tied up all the loose ends. Resolve all your subplots. Show us how your Protagonist has changed or increased his or her resolve. How did his success or failure affect him or her? By now, your theme should be clear and reveal the moral to your story.

Once you have your outline done, input it into screenwriting software, like [Movie Magic Screenwriter 6](http://www.movie-magic.com), to help you format your screenplay properly.
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