

FVM 2032: TV Pilot

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Welcome

Everything for **FVM 2032: TV Pilot** in one place — readings, assignments, worked examples, pilot scripts, and show bibles.

Use the **search box** (top of the sidebar) to find anything: a term like *cold open*, an assignment name, a show title, or a line from a script.

- **Guides** — the core readings on TV formats, structure, and scene craft.
- **Assignments** — what to turn in and how.
- **Examples** — worked loglines, grids, beatsheets, and breakdowns.
- **Your Pilot** — interactive worksheets for your own show: loglines, grid, beatsheet, outline, bible. Saved privately in your browser.
- **Pitching** — the pitching guide and Billy Ray's WGFestival talk.
- **Scripts** — pilot scripts to study and break down.
- **Show Bibles** — real series bibles from working shows.

Guides

TV Formats & Types of Shows

TV Formats

What type of show and who produces the show determines how the show is constructed.

- Genre
 - Drama, comedy, horror, action, soap, etc.
- Format
 - Broadcast TV (NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX, WB)
 - G, PG, & PG-13 rated content with commercials.
 - Cable (HBO, TNT, TBS, HBO, STARZ)
 - G, PG, PG-13, and R-rated content with or without commercials.
 - Streaming (Paramount+, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple+) can be any content with or without commercials.
 - G, PG, PG-13, and R-rated content with or without commercials.
 - As of today, most streamers show no commercials or limited commercials.

Types of Shows

Procedurals

Procedurals are usually your cop, medical, and law shows that feature “closed episodes.” A closed episode is a TV show in which the A-story (the case, the murder, the fire, the problem etc.) is solved by the end of the episode. The A-story for procedurals, like *The Good Wife*, is always the case. The A-story for *CSI* is always the murder. Procedurals are one-hour shows.

Serials or Arc Shows

Serials are any show with an ongoing storyline that arcs the whole series. (*The Game of Thrones*, *Queen Sugar*, *True Detective*, *Breaking Bad*, *Avatar*). Serials are generally one-hour shows.

Dramadies

Dramadies are serials with laughs. (*Barry*, *BoJack Horseman*, *Atlanta*, *Fleabag*, *The Bear*) Dramadies are usually a half-hour show but there are exceptions like *The Marvelous Mrs. Mavel*.

Comedy

Comedy is what its name suggests. Comedies are a mix of procedural, serial, and laughs.

Comedies can be serials but almost always closed episodes. Generally, by the end of a comedy episode, a problem has been solved. Generally, by the end of a comedy's season, the characters have had arcs. (The Office, Blackish, Curb Your Enthusiasm, Rick and Morty)

A Simple and Short History of Television

- Even before radio was conceived, television technology was invented in 1897 by Ferdinand Braun when he invented the cathode ray tube (CRT).
- 1907 was the first time the cathode ray tube was used to produce images.
- The first televisions were sold in late 1920s in the US, UK, and Russia but only scanned at 30 lines so the picture quality and sales were poor.
- NBC and CBS were the first to transmit broadcasts; in New York in 1930's using a transmitter on top of the Empire State Building. But almost no one owned TV's at this point.
- July 1st, 1941 the FCC authorized commercial broadcasting and NBC had the first televised commercial with a shaky,

10 second Bulova watch commercial that aired before a Brooklyn Dodgers, Philadelphia Phillies baseball game.

- On December 7th, 1941 Pearl Harbor was attacked and was the first major news story broken on television.
- While its' technology and popularity were dormant during WWII, television sales picked up, about three years after the end of WWII, starting in 1948.
- .05% of US households had a television in 1946, 55.7% in 1954, and 90% by 1962.
- In 1954 RCA introduced a color television set but they (affordability) didn't become popular until about 1964.
- By 2000 a billion televisions had been sold.

Television to you

Television had a rough start. Besides the bad technology and cost, the first issue with television was that it lacked the talent to create consistently entertaining shows. The most talented entertainers and producers were still working on Broadway and radio.

Still, viewers had a sense of "astonishment and glamour" in the infancy of television.

It wasn't until the 1950's, The Golden Age (1948 – 1959), that TV really took off. TV networks tried a lot of different programs: live shows, variety shows (vaudeville), comedy shows, dramas, and whodunits.

It is called the Golden Age because everything associated with television was new and changing; for example, the (situational comedy) or sitcom was created. News, sports, and politics figured out its role in TV during this time.

There is said to be a re-emergence of a Golden Age of television right now. With so many network, cable, streaming, and internet channels available – the viewer and creator have a bundle of choices.

Unlike film, where there are maybe 200 minor-to-major releases per year, television offers a bundle of opportunities to write big, small, and audience-specific shows.

Pilot scripts are the thing right now. Agents, managers, producers, showrunners, competitions, and fellowships want to read your pilots.

Spec scripts used to be the primary way to get into TV, now it's more about the pilots.

Because of this, I think you should all consider your pilot as an introduction to you, your ability, and your writing style. You should, by the time you leave this program, have 2-3 pilots written. In other words, don't let this pilot be your last.

Lastly...

ACCORDING TO THE WGA (WRITER'S GUILD OF AMERICA) IN 2019

TV NOW

Broadcast TV

- Ad-supported, free, over-the-air TV plus cable (58 million)
- CBS, FOX, NBC, WB
- MTV, TNT, Comedy Central, BET, Hallmark, OWN, ESPN
- 40.3% (and dropping) of all TV usage in the US in June 2024

Free Ad-Supported Streaming TV (FAST)

- Free, ad-supported streaming TV
- Linear, scheduled programming similar to cable but without fees or contracts
- A \$9 billion market in 2024
- Pluto TV (80 million+)
- Tubi (80 million+)
- Roku Channel (83.6 million)
- Freevee (80 million)
- Xumo (40 million)

Advertising-Based Video On Demand (AVOD)

- Ad-supported and on-demand
- Host proprietary libraries of studio-licensed movies and shows.

- Most FAST add AVOD's becoming a hybrid of the two.

Subscription Video On Demand (SVOD)

- Subscription-based.
- Netflix (277.65 million worldwide)
- Disney+ (153.8 million)
- Max (99.6 million)
- Prime (200 million worldwide)
- Hulu (50.2 million)
- Apple+ (25 million)

Transactional Video On Demand (TVOD)

- Pay per view. Download to rent.
1. For more on American TV History = [Click Here](#)
 2. Media Pay Report from Deadline Article = [Click Here](#)

A Writer's Guide to TV Structure

Structuring the One-Hour Drama

Foundations (A, B, C Stories)

Most hour-long dramas weave multiple plotlines together, organized by importance:

- **The “A” Story:** The main plotline.
- **The “B” Story:** The second most important plotline.
- **The “C” Story:** A smaller, tertiary plotline.

The Teaser (Cold Opening)

The **teaser**¹ is the material shown before the opening credits. Its primary function is to grab viewers “faster than the enemies, which are the remote, mouse, or esc button”.

The Four-Act Structure (Broadcast)

The traditional template for a one-hour network drama, built around commercial breaks. Each act must end on a **cliffhanger**² to keep the audience from changing the channel.

Basic Four-Act Grid

(T)	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III	ACT IV
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				

4-Act Structure Breakdown (by Page Count)

Act	Pages
Act 1	~17
Act 2	~13
Act 3	~15
Act 4	~15

¹ Dramatic material before the titles, designed to hook viewers immediately.

² A moment of jeopardy, a shocking reveal, or a dramatic turning point.

The 5 and 6-Act Structures (Broadcast)

Some networks mandate five or six acts to create more commercial breaks, resulting in a “speeded pace” with shorter acts.

5-Act Structure Breakdown

Each act is roughly equal, about 12 pages.

6-Act Structure Breakdown

Each act is roughly equal, about 10 pages.

The Character-Driven Approach (Streaming)

Instead of building to act-break cliffhangers, shows without commercials often break stories “**by character**”. The primary concern is keeping you watching the next hour, so the most important cliffhanger is the one at the very end of the episode.

Structuring the Half-Hour Episode

While sharing principles with one-hour dramas, the half-hour comedy (sitcom) has its own distinct, fast-paced structure, typically running about 22-25 pages.

Half-Hour Structure Breakdown

Section	Pages
Teaser	~2
Act One	~8
Act Two	~8
Act Three	~6
Tag	~1

Teaser (1-2 pages)

A short, punchy opening scene that happens before the title credits. It’s often a self-contained joke or situation that grabs the audience’s attention and sometimes introduces the episode’s theme or A-story problem in a lighthearted way.

Act One (approx. 8-10 pages)

This is the setup. The main goal or problem of the A-story is introduced, and the character’s plan to achieve that goal is set in motion. The B-story is also typically introduced here. The act ends on a turning point where the initial plan hits a significant snag.

Act Two (approx. 8-10 pages)

The “muddle in the middle.” The characters try to solve the problem from Act One, but their efforts only make things worse. Complications escalate, new obstacles arise, and

plans backfire spectacularly. This act ends at the character's lowest point, where the situation seems hopeless or has reached maximum chaos.

Act Three (approx. 6-8 pages)

The resolution. The characters make one last, often desperate or unconventional, attempt to fix everything. The A and B stories are resolved, and the characters learn (or fail to learn) a lesson. The climax of the story happens here.

Tag (1 page)

A very short scene after the main story has concluded. The tag is almost always a final joke that provides one last laugh, often calling back to a smaller joke from earlier in the episode. It serves as a fun, conclusive beat before the credits roll.

Scene Functions

(Shorthand)

Advance the Story/Plot

1. This should go without saying, but nearly every scene has to move the story forward.

Evoke Mood/Tone

1. What kind of movie are we watching? This scene function lets us know.

Bond Audience to Character

1. Make us care about your characters. It's oh so more than just saving cats

Convey Genre –

1. Some scene's main function is simply to relay genre conventions.

Establish/Heighten Tension

1. This scene tightens the screws on a character to create dramatic tension.

Establish/Escalate Conflict

1. This one should go without saying as well, but some form of conflict dominates these scenes.

Create a Setback

1. This is a scene in which a character's goal is thwarted.

Raise the Stakes

1. Similar to heightening tension, these scenes broaden or intensify the consequences should our hero (or any character) fail.

Reveal Backstory/Exposition

1. Challenging scenes to write, here's where we learn about things that happened before the movie started. See: Exposition dump. Also See: monologuing. Also See: avoid both those. Embed a Set-Up (plant)
2. Set-up and payoff – our powerful one-two punch. Obviously; this is the first one.

Reminder of a Set-Up

1. If the set-up occurred a while ago, might want to use this scene function to remind us of it.

Payoff a Set Up

1. If you're going to go to the trouble of setting up, might as well pay it off.

Teach a Character

1. This is a scene in which the character learns something or gains a new insight.

Offer Alternative Perspectives

1. An important scene function, these moments keep the movie from becoming propaganda. As such, these scenes allow opportunities for the audience to create meaning in the story.

Display Eye-Candy

1. Like the name suggests, give us something visual to dazzle our eyes.

Establish a Character Trait

1. These next three are related, and all of them have to do with character building...

Reinforce a Character Trait

1. This function confirms our suspicions about a character's personality.

Further Reinforce a Character Trait

1. Just in case we missed it. Actually, this one is less about the audience missing the trait and more about reconfirming that we were right about a character's personality.

Portray Character

1. Much like the other character functions of a scene, it's a basic function.

Provide Irony

1. How bittersweet this function is – like ray-eee-ain, on your wedding day, which technically isn't really irony, but who's counting?

Add Humor

1. All the world loves a clown.

Raise Dramatic Questions

1. These pique our interest to discover the answer, which conveniently is another function of scenes.

Answer Dramatic Questions

1. Similar to set-up and payoff. Can't have a Q&A with the audience, without the A.

Provide Surprise

1. Boo!

Create Suspense

1. When we absolutely, positively gotta know, these scenes extend the moments between question and answer to leave us begging to know more.

Build Anticipation

1. Similar to suspense, this function serves to set us up for the awesomeness to come.

Get a Reaction

1. One order of shock value to go, please.

Create Contrast

1. A scene function that works with other scenes or within a long scene to change tempo, pace, or any other element you can contrast to generate interest.

Transition Time or Place

1. Perhaps this scene is showing time elapse, or bridging us to another setting.

Misdirect an Audience or Character

1. This function purposely misleads to create interest, proving that red herrings still taste great!

Provide Texture

1. Similar to creating mood and tone, texture refers to adding layers to the story, rounding out its world and characters.

Develop Subtext

1. This function makes us have to read between the lines.

Create Parallel Action

1. Thank you, Edwin S. Porter.

Explore metaphor and symbolism

1. Why should writers of literature have all the fun?

Explore Theme

1. With all due respect to Samuel Goldwyn, if you want to send a message, use this scene function.

Types of Scenes

The Expository Scene

As the name implies, the main function of this scene is to provide backstory and information the audience will need to follow the story. Remember, if a movie is a slice of the story, then there were events that occurred before the movie started. This status quo is shown to the audience in expository scenes.

Backstory is useful to help us see the change the narrative will bring about, build anticipation for the conflicts to come, and enable us to see how the Inciting Incident will overturn the status quo. It's also useful to help us understand the rules of the world.

In the beginning of your movie limit backstory to just the bare minimum we need to understand the story at this time. You can use expository scenes later to expand the depth of the story.

The Signature Scene

Similar to the Expository Scene, this type of scene is used to establish who a character is in a nutshell. It's often our first introduction to a character. As you might expect, these occur early in the movie.

As an introduction, these scenes may include a bit of backstory or show the character in some sort of character-defining action. Either way, we should come out of this scene with the sense of – 'Oh, he's THAT guy.' Or... 'Oh, she's THAT kind of person.'

Obviously greater depth will be provided later in the movie, but for now, the Signature Scene announces to the audience a big-time character has arrived in the movie.

Set-Up and Payoff Scenes —————

The primary purposes of these scenes are to set story elements in motion for later payoffs. Set up and payoff scenes engage the audience by generating anticipation and suspense.

Remember, the audience is actively putting elements together as the story progresses. At their base level, these scenes give the audience something to assemble. These are among the most powerful tools available to get the audience into a movie.

A set up without a payoff is called a widow. A payoff without a setup is called an orphan. Avoid BOTH.

Set ups without payoffs frustrate an audience and make the story appear aimless. Payoffs without setups make the story appear arbitrary, convenient and contrived. Neither of these is good. Typically the first half of the movie is dominated by set up scenes and the second half is dominated by payoffs. By the time you reach the third act, the movie will consist almost exclusively of payoffs.

Obstacle and Complication Scenes

Scenes are driven by goals, both within the scene and overarching throughout the story. Just as the name says, Obstacle Scenes place things in the way of a character to keep him or her from achieving a goal.

Complication Scenes serve the same effect (make life difficult for a character), but they foreshadow and set up obstacles for later in the film. They can also be the results of a previous Obstacle Scene in which the obstacle is overcome, but this leads to even more trouble (a complication.)

The Victory Scene

Obstacles may be overcome within the Obstacle Scene, or this moment can stretch over into a separate Victory Scene. After the hard work overcoming an obstacle, it's time to celebrate! These are also measures of a character's growth and progression toward attaining a goal. It can also serve as contrast to the previous scene, and the scenes to follow.

The Setback Scene

Here a main character fails to overcome an obstacle. It's typically a temporary failure, but the setback helps to plant doubt in the mind of the audience that our intrepid character will actually succeed.

Give the audience enough of these and they may actually believe your hero may not triumph at the end of the movie – but if the hero perseveres through all these setbacks, it shows tenacity, a very endearing character trait for most members of the audience.

If handled properly, Setback Scenes also demonstrate how powerful the antagonist is, giving the overall narrative a sense of unpredictability.

The Discovery Scene

In this scene, a character discovers a vital piece of information, a clue, something valuable he or she will need to solve the problem presented in the movie. This moment of discovery typically inspires the hero

to continue the quest, or sends him or her in a new direction. These types of scenes often come at or near major structural beats in the story. The revelations gained in these scenes alter the story as we know it. These scenes may also come as a result of a Setback or Victory Scene. The setback leads to discovery, or the victory leads to discovery. A subset of the Discovery Scene is the Inspiration Scene.

Inspiration Scene

This type of scene is a specialized form of discovery in which characters discover something within themselves that inspire changes within the characters. Perhaps a flaw is discovered, or a hidden ability. Whatever is discovered, these moments may serve to make

characters rethink their choices, their treatment of others, their lives, plans, etc..., which often leads to...

The Decision-in-Action Scene

Often as a result of a Discovery or Inspiration Scene, a character will make a decision and put that decision into action. Scenes of this type are the result. These scenes may sometimes reflect a major change in story direction as our newly-inspired character takes charge. These scenes are often prime movers of plot and story. They are also often combined within Discovery Scenes.

The Transitional Scene

These typically short scenes serve as transitions to smooth out major jumps in narrative time, space or story threads. Keep them short as they are typically very short on dramatic action as well. Remember, scenes link together to create a seamless movie narrative, but occasionally when making large jumps the linkages need a little bit of help to function. These scenes are often the solution.

The Dazzler

Can be a standalone scene or a form of Transition Scene in functionality, these are our big money scenes that often exist just to show off the power of cinema. Chase sequences, action scenes, beauty shots and flyovers, thrills and spills. The main reason for these scenes is to show off really cool images to the audience. May seem trite or banal, but they make for great trailer moments. Besides eye candy has a joy all its own!

Specialized Scenes

There are a number of specialty scenes that serve specific purposes as the narrative calls for.

Montage Scenes - These show a change over a series of short scenes. Useful when you want to bridge time and show a change but don't want to expend a great deal of narrative weight on these moments. Typically silent (aside from the rousing soundtrack).

Series of Shots - Similar to a montage, a series of shots typically is relegated to showing the completion of a specific task broken down into mini-scenes or shots. Almost always silent.

Flashback Scene - Typically a subset of Expository Scenes, but may also be used to go inside the mind of a character. Dangerous because they take the audience out of the real-time story thread and remind us all that we're watching a movie.

Dream and Fantasy Scenes - Can serve to create their own sense of a story's mystery unfolding, taking us into the subconscious of a character. The same dangers inherent in flashbacks also apply here, but they can be useful so long as they provide new information to the audience.

Before The Pages

To-Do List Before You Start Writing Pages

- Read or re-read William Rabkin's *Writing The Pilot*.
- Think about your Characters. Think about your Scenes. Think about your Act Breaks.
- Think about pace.

Character

The Teaser and every scene should inform us about who your character is. World-building or your concept may get people to tune in, but character gets people to stay. All the time. Every time. Concepts, ideas, and worlds get an audience's attention — Character keeps it.

What does this mean? What does your character want? What are the conflicts getting in the way of that want? Is the conflict internal or external? If it's internal, then what is the external goal or problem?

IT CAN'T ALL BE INTERNAL. THERE SHOULD BE AN EXTERNAL GOAL OR EXTERNAL AND URGENT PROBLEM CAUSING CONFLICT WITH, AND BETWEEN YOUR CHARACTERS.

I'm proud of all of you for creating your storylines, Beatsheets, and outlines. You have all the "then this happens" down or close to it. But I will never get to "then this happens" if I don't care about who it happens to. Character. Character. Character. Write it on your hand. Tape it to your screen. Tattoo it on your arm.

Character. Character. Character.

Scenes

On average, every scene is around two pages. By that logic, a half-hour script (30 pages) is 15 scenes, and an hour script (60 pages) is 30 scenes. This is not an exact science, just a rough estimate. If your pilot or show moves at a very fast pace, you may average closer to 1 scene per minute. If you are consistently writing three pages or longer scenes, then more than likely, your scenes are too long. Scenes should have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Scenes should always have at least 2 of these three things:

1. A character with a goal or objective
2. Conflict (use external conflict to highlight the internal conflict)
3. A Love Song for the Character or for the Audience — the moments when we fall in love with our characters, or our characters fall in love with themselves. Can also be a Hate Song.

Act Breaks

Guide 1: From *Writing The TV Drama*

	Ends around
Teaser and Act 1	page 17
Act 2	pages 25–30
Act 3	pages 35–40
Act 4	pages 45–54

Sonny's List

- Every beat is an action. A character “realizing” something is not a scene.
- Each scene involves a character who wants something but faces resistance.
- The antagonist must be as strong and motivated as the protagonist — the more equal the sides, the more suspense. See the world from your antagonist's viewpoint also.
- Aim at the turning point where the protagonist must make a difficult choice.
- Anchor your story with the worst-case scenario three-fourths through. This is where the protagonist seems to fail and must overcome his internal problem to deal with the opposition.

Guide 2: From *Inside The Room*

- **Teaser** — A situation is introduced that will compel your characters to act and the audience to watch. A good teaser lets the audience know not only the subject of this week's story but also the episode's stakes.
- **Act 1** — All elements are put into place. It's in Act 1 — usually the longest act — that the full ramifications and scope of the problem introduced in the Teaser are realized. B and C stories kick off in the first act.
- **Act 2** — Things get progressively worse. Our heroes thought they had a handle on things, and boy were they wrong.
- **Act 3** — One last element joins the mix and makes things worse. Even the B and C stories aren't going the way characters had hoped.
- **Act 4** — You thought things were bad in Act 3?! Psshtt, not even close.
- **Act 5** — Hey, there's a way out of this mess! In the nick of time, the brightest minds come up with a way to save a life; a case, a family, a prom.

Guide 3: From Shonda Rhimes's Masterclass — Chapter 9, Writing a Script: Structure

“Structuring your script really means making sure that you are servicing the story you are trying to tell.” — Shonda Rhimes

Before you begin writing your script, it's important to understand how a standard, one-hour television drama is structured. Typically on network television, there are about five acts roughly lasting about 11 pages each. Here is how Shonda views the structure of each of the acts:

- **Act 1:** Introduce your characters and present the problem
- **Act 2:** Escalate the problem
- **Act 3:** Worst case scenario happens
- **Act 4:** Begin the ticking clock
- **Act 5:** Characters reach their moment of victory

It is helpful to think about how you want each of your acts to end as you begin to lay out the structure of your episode. Work these out ahead of time and properly set your story up for them, rather than dumping a twist at the end of each act just for excitement's sake.

The other essential components of your episodes are your A, B, and C storylines. The A storyline involves your main character and is the core of your show, your B storyline is secondary and helps the narrative keep moving forward, and the C storyline, sometimes referred to as "the runner," is smallest and holds the least weight.

Take it further: In the era of streaming television, structuring a story around commercial breaks is no longer absolutely necessary. If you are writing a TV show that you envision on one of these streaming platforms, how do you think you should be approaching structure?

Slow Down, Speed Up, and Let It Breathe

A half-hour show with 13 episodes will be about 7 hours of TV for an entire season (Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, and other streamers). That's 3–4 full features and around 400 pages of writing. For network TV, a half-hour show is about 13 hours and 900 pages of writing. That's about 6–7 full features.

Oh, you're doing an hour show? Then that's 13–23 hours of TV, or half of all the Marvel movies. In other words, you're trying to create enough content in one season that it took Marvel 6 years to do. That's anywhere between 800–1550 pages of writing.

Plot, plot, and more plot

Chill, slow down, and let the story breathe.

Chill and take the camera away from the protagonist and show us the lives of the other characters. Remember that B and C-story?

The story feels a bit flat? A bit uninteresting? Too slow?

Speed it up with... Character.

Character goals. Character conflict. Character arcs. Is there urgency in your character achieving these goals? A deadline? Due date? Is time running out? Do your character's flaws create their own set of problems and hurdles?

Are you tired of me typing the word character???

What is this show about?

Stop fighting it. Mimic another show. One day I'm sure you will break the mold. But today, for right now, break the mold with a strong teaser, strong characters, and strong concept. You have to know the rules before you can break them.

By the end of the episode, your audience should know what to expect every week.

If it's a procedural, an audience will expect the doctors, lawyers, police, or firefighters to solve a new case every week. If it's a comedy, they will expect our funny, odd characters to create, then fix as best they can, a new problem every week. If it's a combination of the two, then the audience will expect our characters to get closer to solving the "crime" while also introducing us to their lives and the world they live in. If it's a soap, an audience will expect twists, turns, and a bunch of diabolical backstabbing. Your audience will root for the good guys and hate the rest.

You got a big reveal at Episode 5 — shoulder shrug — who cares if the audience isn't interested enough to get to Episode 5.

Scene by Scene: Ask First, Write Later

Before you write any scene, ask:

- Why does this scene exist?
- Are the characters in this scene necessary?
- Does the scene have adequate conflict?
- Is it clear what the person driving the scene wants?
- Where is the scene located?
- Is the scene an act out?
- Is the scene part of a B or C-story?
- Is there something surprising about the scene?

Taken from Inside The Room by Linda Venis.

Shonda Rhimes Teaches Writing for Television: Chapter Reviews Taken from Masterclass PDF

Click a chapter to expand it.

i Chapter 2: Teach Yourself TV Writing

“You cannot be a writer if you are not a reader. You cannot be a TV writer if you are not a TV watcher.”

In television, the writer is king. Unlike in film, where the director has final say, a television writer’s vision is exactly what will make it to the screen. It’s one of the few places in entertainment where the writer has that much control, and is what makes TV such an exciting medium. It is the writer who decides everything from the story, to the set design, and even what a character wears. To be a successful television writer, a deep knowledge of television history is crucial. You should be watching as much television as you possibly can. If you are writing a medical drama, you must have an understanding of past medical dramas to understand why they worked or failed. A few years ago, there were rigid rules to writing for TV in terms of format. You had to have an “A,” “B,” and “C” story and your episode had to be a certain length. With so many diverse platforms for shows to live on now, any format of storytelling is acceptable. Even so, Shonda recommends that you know the rules so you understand which ones you are breaking.

i Chapter 3: Finding an Idea

“Ideas are everywhere. The only difference between a writer and another person is that we notice them.”

Ideas for stories can and should come from everywhere. Being more aware of the world around you can help you find the seeds of an idea. Listen to conversations around you, from people in the elevator to those in a coffee shop. Pay attention to what’s happening in the news and think about how you can use it to tell your story. To figure out if an idea is suited for television, ask yourself if it has an ending. If you know the conclusion to a character’s journey or story, it may be better suited for a film. If the idea sparks hundreds of more ideas, then you might have the beginnings of a long-running TV show. When coming up with ideas, it is wise to consider outside forces such as what is happening in the current cultural climate, and what networks might be looking for. This does not mean you have to change your idea, but it can be helpful to keep in mind.

i Chapter 4: Developing the Concept

“An idea is a seed. It’s a whisper. It’s a ‘what if?’ A premise is a story.”

As you develop your idea, it’s important to understand the difference between an idea and a premise. An idea, Shonda explains, could be, “a show about surgical interns.” The premise for *Grey’s Anatomy* specifies that it’s a show about *female* surgical interns, and that it’s about their friendship, competition, and the fact that one of them might be sleeping with her boss. A premise is your idea fleshed out into a clear and concise vision for the show that you can state in a few sentences. For Shonda, everything is character driven. Understanding who her characters are and what their journeys will be makes structuring her show that much easier.

i Chapter 5: Researching Your Story

“Research is about making your world real.”

Good research is the key to bringing the world of your story to life for the audience. Research not only provides the details to realistically portray a profession or environment, but it can also spark ideas for settings, episodes, and character development. You should decide what level of authenticity you need for your story. When speaking with experts, it’s important to be a listener, not a talker. Set aside your preconceptions and try to understand their world from their perspective. No detail is too small. Learning about the day-to-day life of a surgical intern informed many decisions in the **Grey’s Anatomy** pilot, from where the characters would gather, to which surgeries would be featured.

i Chapter 6: Creating Memorable Characters: Part One

“If you can create a character that feels like a real person, you have won.”

For Shonda, characters are the heart of storytelling. Memorable characters are essential for a show to resonate with an audience. Start with the basics—age, job, where they live—and then delve into what emotionally drives them. What was their childhood like? How is their relationship with their parents? To ensure all characters are three-dimensional, especially if they are of a different gender than yourself, it’s important to have compassion and rethink your perspective. Well-written characters feel human and relatable, making viewers forget they are not real people.

i Chapter 7: Creating Memorable Characters: Part Two

“Your character has to be an active participant in their own life.”

Television allows for a multitude of characters to interact, so don't create your ensemble in a vacuum. Ask yourself how each character harmonizes with the others, and how they affect the main character. Characters should be active drivers of the story, not just reactive to events. Make them the deciders of their own fate. Character development must happen naturally over time; don't force characters through exciting plot points without considering what their natural next step would be. The story should serve the character's journey.

i Chapter 8: Pitching Your Show

“When you're pitching, you are the show. You are the only representative of your show that they have.”

To get your show on air, you must learn to pitch it effectively. A great pitch is well-structured, visual, and quickly conveys your concept and characters. A good pitch, lasting 5-10 minutes, should cover the premise, the world, the characters, the pilot episode's events, the tone, and the number of planned episodes. Shonda warns against mentioning specific actors or music, as this can distract from your story. Remember that networks want a show they can sell, so think of creative ways to describe your show in market-friendly terms.

i Chapter 9: Writing a Script: Structure

“Structure is your friend. It is the framework upon which your story is built.”

Before writing, it’s important to understand the structure of a standard one-hour TV drama. On network television, a script typically has five acts of about 11 pages each. Plan your act endings ahead of time to properly set up the story. Episodes also consist of A, B, and C storylines, with the A story being the core plot involving the main character.

Act 1: Introduce characters and the problem.

Act 2: Escalate the problem.

Act 3: The worst-case scenario happens.

Act 4: A ticking clock begins.

Act 5: Characters achieve a moment of victory.

i Chapter 10: Writing a Script: Process

“Find the process that works for you. There is no right way to do this.”

Before you begin the physical act of writing, Shonda recommends creating a beat sheet and an outline. A beat sheet lays out the important moments and what needs to happen in each act. The outline expands on the beat sheet, detailing the specific scenes you will write. This provides a guide to follow as you write your script. Visualizing the final scene can help structure the entire episode. Every writer’s process is different, so find a method that works for you.

i Chapter 11: Writing a Script: Effective Habits

“A writer is a runner. You are running a marathon. You have to keep your muscles in shape.”

Just like a runner, a writer should write every day to keep their creative muscles strong. There is no perfect method, but finding rituals or creature comforts—a specific drink, a favorite chair, certain music—can help the process. If you experience writer’s block, try keeping two creative projects going at once so you can switch between them. Develop a writing schedule that works for you, whether it’s early mornings or weekend binges. The most important thing is that you are making progress on your script.

i Chapter 12: Writing a Script: The Pilot

“The pilot is the promise of your show.”

You don’t have a TV show without a compelling pilot. The pilot is crucial for hooking an audience and setting up your characters and season-long storyline. Shonda suggests choosing a character to act as the audience’s guide, introducing the world and other characters without relying on clunky exposition. Successful pilots all share one thing: a fantastic opening that grabs viewers and says something important about the show. Take great care in crafting your opening scene to ensure it leaves a lasting effect on the audience.

i Chapter 13: Writing Authentic Dialogue

“Dialogue is one of the most important tools you have as a writer.”

Dialogue is one of the most critical parts of TV writing, and no word should be wasted. It’s one of the best ways to reveal who your characters are. Shonda crafted the speech patterns of characters like Cristina Yang and George O’Malley to be deliberately different and calibrated to their personalities. To improve, learn how people speak in real life by observing conversations, noting speech patterns, and seeing how people often speak imperfectly, leaving sentences unfinished or cutting others off.

i Chapters 14-20: Case Studies: Grey's Anatomy and Scandal

“Look at it, figure out what works, figure out what you like. And then go apply that to your own work.”

Now that the fundamentals are understood, it's time to break down the pilots for *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*. Shonda advises writers to consider the following for their own scripts:

Think about **setting as a symbolic place**, not just a location.

Use a character as a **guide for the audience**.

Create an **exciting opening** that makes people lean in.

Ground story choices in character.

Avoid clichés.

Know your **characters' secrets** before you start writing.

Plan your **act breaks** ahead of time.

i Chapter 21: Editing Your Script

“The editing process is what makes a script great.”

Once you've finished your first draft, the all-important editing stage begins. While every writer's process is different, the goal is the same: ensure scenes resonate, dialogue is original, the story is interesting, and there is no excess exposition. Shonda offers several tips:

Read your dialogue out loud to hear how it sounds.

Cut anything that doesn't further the plot.

Seek honest, external feedback and listen to what readers don't understand to problem-solve.

i Chapter 22: Beyond the Pilot: Writing a Series

“Fulfill the promise of your show.”

Many pilots get made, but few become hit series. To keep an audience watching, Shonda advises you to fulfill the promise of your show. The second episode should feel like the pilot all over again, reinforcing the story you promised the audience. Stick to that promise until you’ve earned the audience’s trust. Be creative and use your best ideas now; don’t save them for future seasons you might not get. Ensure every element has a payoff and that plotlines are grounded in what is natural for your characters to do next.

i Chapter 23: Scandal Case Study: “It’s Handled”

“Let your dialogue do more than one thing at once.”

The airport hangar scene between Olivia and Rowan Pope in *Scandal* is a powerful example of how dialogue reveals character relationships. The dialogue also offers insight into Olivia Pope’s motivations. The script shows Olivia’s inability to speak while her father reprimands her, revealing his power and the language he uses to shame her. This demonstrates how to use dialogue on multiple levels to advance the plot and reveal character.

i Chapter 24: Breaking into the Industry

“Your writing is your currency.”

There’s no single rulebook for making it in Hollywood, but there are ways to increase your chances of success. If you get an assistant job, maintain a positive attitude even with mundane tasks, as no one wants to work with someone grouchy. Build relationships not only with executives but also with your peers, who may provide opportunities as they rise in their careers. Most importantly, remember that your writing is your most valuable asset. Writing is a job you don’t need to be hired to do, so write every day and focus on creating original content.

i Chapter 25: Working in a Writer's Room

"A writer's room is a magical place."

A writers' room can be creative and fulfilling, but also intimidating. Shonda provides tips for success: If you're unsure what to do, volunteer to write on the whiteboard. Always be ready with ideas and comments to show you have valuable opinions. Don't pitch plot ideas just because they sound exciting; instead, center your pitches around what would be a natural next step for a character. Support your fellow writers and embrace the unique culture of the room.

i Chapter 26: Working in TV Production

"It's your job as the writer to know your show better than anybody else."

Working in TV production is a thrilling experience, especially when it's your own script coming to life. If your first pilot is produced, you'll face a steep learning curve. Rely on the experts around you, especially your line producer, to understand budgets, scheduling, and crew responsibilities. As the writer, provide clear action descriptions in your script. When hiring actors, vet them well, as you may be working with them for many years.

i Chapter 27: Showrunning

"You are the keeper of the vision."

A showrunner holds the overall creative authority and management responsibility for a TV series. They oversee scripts, production decisions, final edits, and serve as the face of the show. Despite the administrative duties, a showrunner's core task remains telling a great story. There's no way to learn the job without doing it, but the principles of being a showrunner—negotiation, time management, and communication—can be applied in everyday life.

i Chapter 28: Life of a Writer

“You are a writer. So write.”

A writer writes every day. Period. This is the necessary tradeoff. It doesn't have to be a lot, and it doesn't have to be great, but by writing something, you are already ahead of those who haven't written in weeks. Writing is a difficult and lonely process, so it's important to celebrate the good moments, like finishing a scene or receiving a compliment. Dismiss the notions of work/life balance and the idea that you don't belong; if you are in the room, you belong there.

i Chapter 29: Shonda's Journey

“The only limit to your success is your own imagination.”

Shonda's love for language and storytelling began early, fostered by supportive parents. Her father's wisdom, “the only limit to your success is your own imagination,” became a guiding principle. Throughout her journey, which included non-writing jobs, Shonda stayed focused on her strength: telling a compelling story. She remained open to opportunities, seizing the chance to write for television after working on films. She never allowed the fact that there were few women or black writers in the industry to deter her.

Assignments

A, B, & C Storyline Loglines and Synopsis Assignment = 15 Points

Directions:

Loglines

You will write a logline of 2-3 sentences that gives a broad idea of your A-Story, B-Story, C-Story, etc.

Synopsis

You will write a more detailed 1/2 page synopsis for your A-Story, B-Story, C-Story, etc.

Note: The loglines give you the shape of your story ideas.

The synopsis allows you to fill in the shapes with details.

Give yourself time. Prepare. Prepare. Prepare.

Submit completed work as a PDF in the Discussion Board.

The Grid (fill-in worksheet)

Break your episode down scene by scene. Number each scene, give it a short description, and tag the storyline — **(A)**, **(B)**, **(C)**.

Name: _____ Show / episode: _____

#	Teaser / Cold Open	Act I	Act II	Act III	Act IV	Act V / Tag
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						

The Grid Breakdown Template

TEASER / COLD OPEN	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III	ACT IV

TEASER / COLD OPEN	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III	ACT IV

Pilot Script Breakdowns

Purpose and Goal:

This assignment will prepare you for the upcoming TV Pilot outline you will complete. It also provides tools to use, learn, and master for your future writing and helps you become aware of your best writing process.

Instructions:

PART 1 – BREAKDOWN USING THE GRID

- Pick a pilot episode script to break down.
 - Read the script and break the episode down from the script only.
 - The script must also have its Act Breaks written in the script, or at least be a show with commercials. Sorry-not-sorry streamers.
- Use THE GRID to briefly describe every scene's plot points and character actions. Then, find and break the scenes into their appropriate act breaks.

PART 2 – STORYLINES

- Write a logline for each storyline you identify in the pilot episode.

PART 3 – CHARACTERS

- For each identified character with a storyline, write a two to three-sentence paragraph synopsis of who your character is in the pilot episode only.

Beatsheet Assignment

Instructions:

1. You will write a brief yet concise scene by scene list of the essential story beats, or plot points for each of or your A-Story, B-Story, C-Story, etc.
2. You will also “break your story” by highlighting potential act breaks for each of your A-story, B-story, and C-story.

Breaking Your Story

“Breaking Your Story” is determining where would be a good place to end an act or go to commercial. At the end of an act break you want to keep the audience from turning away from the show. Find the moments in your storylines that present strong plot, emotional, or mystery moments that have the potential to hold an audience’s interest until the commercials are over.

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The Bible Assignment

FVM 2032 - THE TV PILOT

Instructions:

You will write a TV Bible for the show you have created using the available TV Bibles in our Shared Folder as an Outline.

For this assignment, you will create and complete the following sections:

1. An Introduction – This should give the reader a sense of what your story is about. BE ENTERTAINING. BE ENGAGING.

For example, read Stranger Things “Introduction, The Montauk Conspiracy, and Story” or The Wire “Overview.”

2. A Character Section

For example, read Stranger Things “The Kids, The Outsider, The Teenagers, and The Adults,” or Grey’s Anatomy “The Doctors.”

3. A Plot Section

For example, read Stranger Things “Story and Structure,” or Fargo “The Arcs.”

4. A Tone or Style Section

For example, read Stranger Things “Horror, Tone, and Style,” True Detective “Suspense and Humanism.”

And one of the following:

5. Series Section

1. For Hour Long Pilots

1. Summarize in detail your first two episodes: Pilot Episode and Episode 2.

1. For example, read Grey’s Anatomy “Episode 1” or The Wire “Episode 101.”

2. Sketch out the remainder of your Season 1 with A,B,C Storyline loglines.

3. A minimum of 10 episodes is required for the entire Bible.

1. For example, read True Detective “One,” or Scrubs “Pilot.”
2. Half Hour Pilots
 1. Summarize in detail your first four episodes: Pilot Episode, Episode 2, 3, and 4.
 1. For example, read Grey’s Anatomy “Episode 1” or The Wire “Episode 101.”
 2. Sketch out the remainder of your Season 1 by A, B, C storyline loglines.
 3. A minimum of 10 episodes is required for the entire Bible.
 1. For example, read True Detective “One” or Scrubs “Pilot.”

What is a TV Bible?

Early in the year, we pitched story ideas. The idea of a pitch is to persuade and excite the audience (listener) into the world of your story. A pitch should excite, entertain, and connect the listener to the promise of your show. At the end of your pitch, a listener should be able to see the endless possibilities of your show or curious enough to ask.

A pitch sets the stage. A pitch is a hook.

The Bible, then, is a more detailed pitch extended out over your show’s entire season or series.

When creating your Bible, you are trying to answer the questions, “Why are you telling this story? And why now?”

“Why are you telling this story?”

This question is answered by the funny, kooky, straight-laced, and weird characters populating your story. It highlights their wants, needs, fears, flaws, problems, secrets, and motivations.

“And why now?”

This question is answered by the world, the style, the time, and the tone of your story. This answer requires you to declare your story as being different than anything else produced. Here, you compare and contrast the different parts of your show to other shows, highlight the differences, and focus on the audience’s emotional draw.

Suggestion

I suggest you pick a Bible from our folder and use its structure as an outline. As you write more Pilots and more Bibles, you will eventually create your own style. There is no universal way to write a Bible, but most Bibles contain the same elements. So if you are unsure of what those elements are, what it should look like, or their overall feel, use the Bibles provided as an Example.

Examples

Example: The Good Wife — Loglines, Grid & Outline

Loglines

A-Story

After a deadlocked jury, JENNIFER COMBS, 29, a working mom, is retried for the murder to her ex-husband in a faked carjacking. Desperate and heartbroken from imprisonment and estrangement from her daughter, Lilly, 4, who she hasn't seen or spoken to in a year. Who can help her?

B-Story

ALICIA FOLLICK, 30's, the good wife and mom, restarts her life as a lawyer at Stern, Lockhart & Garvin, after an embarrassing sex scandal involving her powerful husband. With the help of the firm's private investigator, KALINDA, Alicia investigates and eventually wins the Jennifer Combs case, all while juggling mom duties, work duties, potential rivalries, and love interests, slowly becoming more confident in each.

C-Story

DAVID FOLLICK, 30's, resigns as District Attorney and is sent to jail, where he tries to hold onto his good wife, Alicia.

D-Story

JACKIE FOLLICK, Alicia's mother in law, tries to manage the house and grandkids now that Alicia has gone back to work. Out of touch, and raised in a different era, Jackie flounders, innocently, being the good mother. I don't know how old Jackie is, but I'm sure she would consider it rude if you asked.

E-Story

CARY, Alicia's unbeknown rival, hogs all of SONIA, 20's, Cary and Alicia's shared assistant's time.

The Grid Breakdown

Pilot Outline

Pilot Outline October 24, 2008

By Robert King & Michelle King TEASER

COLD OPEN

Prolouge

A press conference. Standing at a podium is a nervous official reading a statement: “As of today, I have tendered my resignation as District Attorney of Chicago. I am determined to fight these charges and regain the trust of my family.”

Oh, one of *those* press conferences. Scandal. In the key of Elliott Spitzer. The grim official is DAVID FOLLICK (40), a backslapping Bill Clinton: smart, political, funny, calculatedly seductive. But we move in on our real hero.

His wife. Standing beside him.

ALICIA FOLLICK (late-30s). Proper. Pretty. She’s always been the good girl—the good girl who became the good wife, then the good mom: in her navy St. John suit: devoted, struggling never to outshine her husband. She tries to keep a neutral expression on her face as David continues: “This charge that I had some kind of untoward relationship with these call girls is ludicrous. I have never abused my office. I have never taken bribes. I have never...” This isn’t sounding good: financial *and* sexual indiscretions.

A mortified Alicia glances up at the room, the hordes of reporters. Surreal. She looks toward David, notices a half-inch piece of lint on his sleeve. She focuses on it, obsesses on it, finds herself reaching up to remove it when a hand takes hers. Oh, it’s David, done with his statement, escorting her from the room, away from the shouting reporters, into...

...a backstage green room where four political advisors immediately sweep around him: “We’ll set up an interview with the Tribune—” “We’ll need Alicia to do an interview on Good Morning, Chicago—” Alicia eyes them from across the room. Eyes the lint on David’s suit. David crosses to her to ask quietly, “Are you alright?” And...

...SLAPPPPP!...

Alicia slaps him so hard she almost knocks him over. He falls to one knee, looks up at her stunned. But Alicia, very controlled, very proper, just straightens her coat, grabs her purse, and leaves.

END COLD OPEN

First Day

Three months later.

Alicia waits, alone, in the 27th floor conference room of Stern, Lockhart & Garvin, a mid-level Chicago law firm. Opening a new chapter in her life, she’s desperate to forget the last one: wearing a new Nanette Lepore suit, new shoes, new hairstyle: looser, more career woman than political wife. She looks up at...

...a clock: 9:45. Conference room still empty. Okay, something's wrong. She goes to the door, asks a secretary: "I'm sorry, it's my first day; isn't the staff meeting at 9:30?" The secretary nods. Alicia: "Is everyone just late?" The secretary shakes her head: "You're in the wrong conference room. It's up one floor."

BAM— Alicia blasts into the stairwell—shit—runs up the stairs two at a time, accidentally drops her new binder; it rattles down several flights. Screw it. She continues on. Snags a stocking racing through a 28th floor door into the upstairs reception. Interior decoration all trying to warm up the skyscraper look with hints of Stickley, Falling Waters.

"Which way to the conference room?" The receptionist points through double doors. Alicia bangs through them, leaving the two receptionists trading a look. "Is that her?" The other nods. "Her hair's different." As...

The first day

...Alicia passes corner offices, secretarial stations, coming to the identical *upstairs* glass-walled conference room; the only difference, this one packed with people, seated, standing. The full staff. Partners, associates, paralegals. Forty-five people.

Shit. Alicia grimaces—the worst thing for her is to be late. She slips in the back, unnoticed behind a screen of standing junior associates, all tall, young. Late 20s seems to be the age du jour here. Someone notices her. CARY (26), her competition. Formidable. Harvard grad. Runway model handsome.

The meeting wraps up, Alicia trying to piece together what she missed. A massive civil suit fell into the firm's lap the night before. A pharmaceutical company fired their representation. "We'll need a full-court press to impress them. So associates need to take the lower priority cases. Jonah, you'll take Harbor; Janice, you'll get a continuance on trial readiness. And Alicia, you'll take the pro bono."

Alicia looks up at this: What? Something she missed.

There it is listed on a squeegee board: "pro bono retrial." But the meeting is breaking up. Alicia sees one of the partners starting out the door, rushes after him: "Will." And...

4 . Will.

...WILL GARVIN (38) turns with a smile. He always has a smile. Will is someone who makes it all look easy—life, law, sex—even when it's not: he's on his second divorce, and isn't sure he likes the law anymore. He and Alicia had a crush on each other at Georgetown Law, and still comfortably tease and joke as if no time passed.

As they walk, rush, Will discusses Alicia's pro bono case as if she were already up to speed: Ideally we wouldn't want you to jump into a trial like this, but we need to free up our first string for this civil case; so you think you'll be all right with it?

Alicia just stares at him: "Oh, yeah, no problem." Good, because Will was the one who suggested the retrial be handed off to her. It's a low priority pro bono case, the firm just donating its billable hours. It's also a retrial, so the defense strategy is pretty much set in stone from the first trial. So you'll be fine.

Alicia nods, tries to find out more, but her cell rings "The Bitch is Back." Will laughs: Who gets "The Bitch is Back?" Oh, her mother-in-law. Alicia's daughter has a wicked sense of humor and set up the ring tones. Will laughs, asks what Alicia's ring tone is, but they're interrupted by a woman passing: "We'd better do this now. Let's go."

Oh, she's pointing to Alicia. Do what? Alicia follows...

5. Dawna.

...senior partner, DAWNA LOCKHART (56), into her impressive corner office overlooking the Chicago River. Tough, powerful, self-assured, over-busy, Dawna is a SEX IN THE CITY feminist, always dressing like a million bucks, and multitasking with calm efficiency: answering phones, yelling orders out to her male assistant, and now...

...filling Alicia in on the law firm's expectations: promptness, teamwork, and absolutely no office politics! "We're all rowing together or we're all sinking." But there's something about Dawna's tone: her condescension. She eyes Alicia trying to take notes, talks fast, then pointedly repeats it slowly so Alicia can catch up.

She has a packed box all ready for Alicia: the retrial files. Dawna was the original lawyer on the case—defending an indigent woman accused of killing her ex-husband and making it look like a failed carjacking. Dawna made a silk purse out of a sow's ear with this trial: it was a 1st degree murder charge with some "bad facts," and Dawna ended up with a deadlocked jury: 6 to 6. She's not even sure why the D.A. is retrying, except he's new and intent on proving himself.

Alicia continues to take notes, or try to take notes as Dawna's dog, an aging Jack Russell terrier, jumps up on her, nuzzling and sniffing. Dawna suddenly yells mid-sentence: "Justice!" Alicia looks up: what—? Oh, the dog's name.

Dawna finishes by talking about the petition she filed for bail. The hearing is today at four—JUSTICE, down! We could ask for a continuance, but that would keep the accused in prison for another month. The two are interrupted by...

...the other new associate, Cary, needing a briefing on the civil case. He was given the plumb assignment of second chair. Alicia can see the difference in the way Dawna treats him: warmer, more patient. Clearly he's Dawna's protégé.

Alicia is dismissed, exits with the file box, catches her breath. Dawna's male assistant doesn't even look up, offering her a lint roller. Oh, Alicia sees her skirt covered with dog hair. Starts to roll it off as...

6. Cary.

...Cary exits, offers to help Alicia with her file box. Sure. Cary chats as the two continue on to the elevator, and down a level to their neighboring offices.

He asks how she's holding up after the scandal of the last three months. "Wow, you must be strong. After all that, I'd be hiding in a cave." Alicia just eyes this kid, not sure if he has an agenda or not. He talks about the phenomenon of Comeback Moms, and how he really respects her for that—to return to the workplace after so many years away, raising kids.

His mom is thinking of doing the same.

Alicia sees a small metal clip on his pant leg, offering "You might want to do something about that." Oh, Cary quickly slips it off. Was he wearing that at the staff meeting? He bikes to work: that's why the clip. You know, for the environment.

The two come to their neighboring offices where they share the same assistant, SUZANNE (25), a calculatedly perky and ambitious college grad. She clearly has a boss-crush on Cary, already working to unpack his office, as she yells over her shoulder to Alicia an afterthought, "The investigator came by to fill you in."

Alicia nods, starts to enter her office when Cary offers her a last "Let the best man win." Alicia stops: what? Oh, Cary quickly backtracks: Sorry, I shouldn't have said anything. Forget I said a word. And he enters his office. Gone.

Alicia stares at his closed door, frowns. As she is eyed by...

7. The crime.

...a woman sitting in Alicia's tiny office. KALINDA SHARMA (27), the investigator.

An East Indian stunner. A Bollywood Erin Brokovich. Sexy, no-nonsense, driven, sexually free, independent, a cool temperament. She has a boyfriend who's a cop, another who's a rap star, a girlfriend who's a political op. (Her bisexuality never commented on: just an unremarkable fact of life.)

She's there to take Alicia through the crime. Pulling exhibits from the trial box—gory crime scene photos, autopsy diagrams, evidentiary reports—she explains...

It started a year ago. A carjacking. Or at least that's what the cops thought at first. There had

been a series of grisly carjackings in the upscale Chicago suburb of Wilmette.

Thieves would target an expensive parked car, fix a clip to its fuel line, follow the driver a mile until he ran out of gas, pretend to be Good Samaritans, rob the driver and passenger, shoot them in the face, dump their bodies, and take the car.

But right away there was something suspicious about this newest crime scene.

For one thing, the car wasn't upscale. Why would carjackers target a rusting Honda? For another, there was no clip on the fuel line. And last, and most tellingly, the passenger was only shot in the leg. This was JENNIFER LARCH (29), the accused, a pretty but painfully shy mother and grammar school teacher. Alicia studies her picture: recognizes that lost, hunted, and overwhelmed look on her face.

Jennifer claimed the driver, her ex-husband, MICHAEL, struggled with the carjacker, and that's why she was only shot in the leg. But the police began to think the crime was a murder disguised as a foiled carjacking. Jennifer, they believed, was the one who shot and killed Michael, then injured herself. And...

8. To the courthouse.

...as Kalinda and Alicia start toward the Cook County Courthouse for the bail hearing, Kalinda continues...

Jennifer, instead of using her cellphone to call for help for her dying ex-husband, drove a half-mile to a gas station payphone. She said she couldn't get any cell reception, but the police began to believe that Jennifer drove in order to dump the murder weapon. So Jennifer was arrested and charged with 1st degree murder. Her motive? She was in an ugly custody battle with Michael over their 4-year-old daughter.

9. In court.

The defense table. Alicia goes to it. Sits. An actress shoved out on stage. Waiting for the judge. Her cellphone rings Guns n' Roses "Sweet Child of Mine." She quickly slaps it off.

The prosecutor enters. MATAN BRODY (29), African-American, cocky, likes the power if not the paycheck of an A.D.A. He looks over at the defense table, sees Alicia. What the—? He looks again.

The wife of the *ex*-D.A.

He elbows the other A.D.A., SANDRA PAI, a tough Asian lawyer in angular pantsuits, points, whispering: "Wow, they must really be broke—he has his wife working." The two stroll over to...

...Alicia, offer their hellos, sympathies, the air thick with *schadenfreude*. Matan worked under Alicia's husband in the D.A.'s office, and met Alicia at Christmas parties. He asks how David is doing, congratulates her for landing on her feet, compliments her strength, observes the phenomenon of moms returning to the workplace, etc. And Alicia, used to this routine tour of the inanities, gives her usual stock polite answers.

Matan and Sandra return to the prosecution table, trying to suppress grins, can't help it. Like shooting fish in a barrel.

The accused is escorted in. Jennifer. Startled, she sees Alicia: where's Dawna? Alicia starts to explain she's a replacement from the same firm, but Jennifer cuts to the chase: How long have you been practicing? Alicia pauses, admits she worked for two years out of law school, but this will be her first case in 13 years.

Jennifer crumbles. She's been abandoned.

The judge enters. His Honorable COLIN BOGIRA (62). Not the happiest man in the world. Ex-Marine. Losing his hair. Nicotine gum wrappers covering his desk. He barely looks up, turns to the defense table: "Okay, let's hear it."

Alicia stands. Opens her mouth, pauses. Where are the words? She utters an "um," but that's all she gets out as Matan interrupts: Illinois has great difficulty with granting bail, your honor, due the cruelty of the crime, and Jennifer's threat, in the midst of a custody hearing before the murder, to run off with her daughter.

Alicia, always the good girl, keeps trying to interrupt "Your honor, I... Your honor..." But there isn't much politeness in Chicago criminal courts, the prosecutor barreling on: "The people are ready to retry this right now, Your Honor. If Mrs. Follick is so intent on getting her client out why doesn't she just agree to a speedy retrial?"

And Judge Bogira looks up at the name—"Mrs. Follick?" Really?

He smiles, waves for Matan to shut up, turns to Alicia: "So, Mrs. Follick, your husband and I never quite got along." Uh-oh, Alicia starts to clear her throat, interject, but Bogira waves her off too... "—but if the prosecution thinks that will in some way prejudice me against your client, he is sorely mistaken. Bail granted."

And that's it. Alicia stands there. She didn't even get out a full sentence, and she won. Jennifer offers her a handshake: thank you. No problem, Alicia nods. She's a lawyer now —*again*.

ACT ONE

10. The interview.

Back at the office, Kalinda and Alicia question Jennifer who is thrilled to have her first good cup of coffee in a year.

Alicia tries to get her assistant, Suzanne, to take notes, but she's busy prepping Cary for an evidentiary hearing. So Alicia takes notes while dealing with a human resource drone who continually enters, exits, needing her "new employee" info: social security numbers, I9 forms, driver's licenses. Kalinda finally shoves a chair in front of the door.

Jennifer has only one thing on her mind: seeing her 5-year-old daughter. After her arrest, she lost custody to her in-laws. The worst thing was having no one visit her in prison.

Promising to work on reversing the custody decision, Alicia can't help but feel a kinship with Jennifer: especially when Jennifer talks about how overnight she went from being an ordinary housewife to a murderer; and how the press used family photos of her making lion faces at her daughter to make her look unbalanced. Alicia gets it.

Kalinda, meanwhile, interrupts, having no time for this emotional crap. The Achilles heel of the case, to Kalinda's mind, is Jennifer's claim to have seen the carjacker's red pick-up truck approach from across an empty Walmart parking lot. The prosecution easily showed Jennifer was lying, by playing the Walmart's security video. No truck.

Could Jennifer have been mistaken?

No, Jennifer apologizes, sticking to her story—even though it hurts the case. Alicia studies her throughout: her body language, what she does with her hands. This is something Alicia is good at: ferreting out lies. She says it's because she's raising two teenagers. (Although, as the always-blunt Kalinda points out, it didn't work so well with her husband.)

Interview over, Alicia and Kalinda set tasks. Kalinda will try to undercut the surveillance tape; Alicia will question the jurors from the first trial—the ones who agreed to post-verdict interviews—in order to tweak her presentation for the second trial. She tries to get her assistant to phone the jurors to set up interviews, but Suzanne is busy now taking notes on a Cary teleconference. Great, Alicia sighs.

11. The competition.

Heading down to her car in the underground garage, Alicia sees Will returning from lunch. She starts to wave when she sees a pretty paralegal laughing with him, seemingly intimate. Oh. Alicia, feeling uncomfortable, hangs back, trying not to be seen, but her cell phone rings—"The Bitch is Back." Damn. Will hears it, turns, laughs: What are you doing there?

He hurriedly tells the paralegal to go on ahead, and escorts Alicia to her car. Alicia looks over at him, decides to ask. Cary mentioned ‘Let the best man win.’ What’s he talking about? Is there something I should know?

Will starts cautiously. There was some reluctance to hire someone like Alicia, someone with so much scandal baggage, so Will argued to the other senior partners that they hire *both* Alicia and Cary, give them six months to prove themselves, and whoever doesn’t, fire. Alicia thanks him for believing in her. Then she gets in her car, shaken.

12. The foreman.

DePaul University. Classes out. The jury foreman, DR. DOWNING, a Jeffrey Toobin-like history professor, rushes from class to class as Alicia runs to catch up. Intent on doing well, we see a new intensity in her eyes as she asks him about the trial evidence: what worked for him, what didn’t. She’s trying to fine-tune for the next trial.

To Alicia’s pleasure, Dr. Downing says everything worked. It was a great case. Very convincing. The witnesses were believable, solid. In fact, he voted for conviction right from the start.

Alicia stops: Wait, what?

He voted for conviction right from the start. Yes, but, I’m with the defense.

Oh. The professor looks at her anew: I thought you were with the D.A.’s office. How can you represent that murderer?

Shit. Alicia charges on: But why do you think six other jurors found her not guilty? The judge polled the jury afterwards and you were equally deadlocked 6 to 6.

No, from the very beginning: the jurors voted 11 to 1 to convict: on the very first ballot. Five jurors eventually went over to the “not guilty” side because they wanted out of that jury room; they needed to prove to the judge they were hopelessly deadlocked. They weren’t convinced, they were exhausted.

Alicia stares at him: Uh-oh.

13. The hold-out.

Alicia phones Kalinda about this newest hitch. The deadlock wasn’t necessarily even. It started as an 11 to 1 vote until one heroic juror convinced five others to peel off to her side. Alicia’s visiting the heroic female hold-out right now. Kalinda tells her to get all her particulars: race, income, education, so they can gear jury selection toward her profile.

A woman’s voice comes from inside the hold-out’s apartment, “Let yourself in.” Alicia enters, finds an apartment filled with cats. Hundreds of them. Covering TV sets, couches, and large stacks of newspapers. A woman exits the bathroom in a mumu. FANNY (60),

angry: “I don’t like the plumbing. It makes noises at night.” Fanny seems to think Alicia is the plumber.

Correcting her, Alicia asks her cautiously about the case. Oh, yes, Fanny remembers everything about it. She liked the defense attorney. She had very pretty clothes.

Uh-oh. Alicia asks why she voted “not guilty.” Well, it was mostly because she hated the other jurors. They took her sandwich. They said they didn’t, but she knows they did. Who else could have taken it? Well, she sure showed them.

Alicia stares at this woman. Oh my god. She realizes, unless they get a jury full of crazy cat ladies, they’ll lose.

ACT TWO

14. David.

Tamms Minimum Security Prison. An old brick prison. Some trees. Barbed wire. Not exactly Club Fed, but not bad either. Families talk with prisoners in a cafeteria-like visiting area, except for...

...one prisoner sitting alone at a table. He looks up, pleased, seeing his visitor approaching: it’s Alicia. David grins “Well, this is a surprise.”

We recognize him from the press conference. David looks good, wearing his khaki prison uniform well: like a three-piece suit. Two months into a two year plea bargained sentence for selling lighter sentences to drug dealers, he’s still the handsome, impressive D.A., with a sense of humor, sly seductive manner. Sometimes it’s hard to hate him.

When they said there was a visitor, he thought it was his mother. Alicia explains: she hasn’t visited him because... well, she had to deal with the house sale, moving, getting the kids into public school, finding a job.

David finally pushes her to admit the real reason. She was angry—is angry.

David nods. Having seen the kids a few days earlier, he wants to know how they’re *really* doing. Well, Grace, their 13-year-old, says she’s alright with the switch to public school, but schoolmates discovered her background and played her “*the* tape.” David winces: damn. David Jr. (14), on the other hand, is making lots of friends. He’s using the scandal and infamy for its celebrity-value. Alicia’s not sure whether that’s a sign of health or something else.

David takes Alicia’s hand, knows this is hard on her, but he’s innocent. She shoots him a look: come on. David amends— innocent of the abuse of office charges. Alicia never gave a shit about that. It’s the fact that there is a tape out there of him talking about sucking the toes of a 22-year-old hooker!

They start to argue until Alicia interrupts herself: No, no, she's not here to fight. She has a client who talked about how hard it was to be in prison and have no family visiting. So that's why she's here.

Yeah, the kids told David her new job was going well. Who's the judge? Bogira. David laughs: Bogira hates me. Alicia nods: she knows. But David immediately reverts to schemer mode. Bogira likes the ladies. Wear something revealing in court. That black outfit you have. He'll love that. Alicia shakes her head: that's not her.

David was the original D.A. on the case, and he starts to remember there was something about the case: what was it? Early on the cops followed a false lead, but then they discovered Jennifer's custody motive, and turned to her pretty quick.

Alicia looks up, interested: what false lead?

Nothing much. Some trace evidence on the victim's clothes. Nothing came of it. The cops "pitted" it. You know, deep-sixed it. Never reported on it because it was irrelevant.

Alicia stares at him, thinking.

15. The murder scene.

The murder scene. Mundane in the daylight. An empty windswept turnout near Lake Michigan. Kalinda "walks the scene," taking pictures, as Alicia fills her in on the possibility of trace evidence that went nowhere, but was left out of the discovery.

Kalinda nods: Interesting. You could push the police corruption angle. Yep, Alicia nods, already going there, or even accuse the D.A. of withholding evidence. It might be enough to raise reasonable doubt even without a cat lady.

In a better mood, the two cross toward the Walmart parking lot, where Jennifer saw the pick-up approach. They eye the three surveillance cameras, and start to think it through: If Jennifer is telling the truth, then the pick-up crossed here: in full view of the cameras.

So why didn't it appear on the surveillance tapes?

16. The security video.

Kalinda and Alicia approach the harried and defensive Walmart Security Guard. And this is where Kalinda is at her best: ratcheting up her flirtatious Erin Brokovich side, transforming a man's defensiveness into puppy dog agreeability.

Alicia just stands in awe of her.

The guard takes them upstairs to his office overlooking the sales floor, shows them the surveillance tape from the night of the murder. No approaching red pick-up truck. Is there any way the cassette tape could have been mislabeled with the wrong date? No. But even if it were, the guard made his nightly rounds at 11:00 just before the carjacking. And he saw no pick-up. As Kalinda continues to question him, Alicia notices...

...the outer secretary's office. A desk covered with framed baby pictures. A trash can filled with Diet Cokes. Alicia considers it, buys two Diet Cokes from a machine, approaches the heavyset secretary, LANIE (45), offers her one, lying: "The machine accidentally gave me two."

The two chat. Lanie, like Alicia, returned to work after raising a family. Her only gripe: the company keeps giving raises to idiots who don't follow the rules—just because they're men. Alicia knows the feeling: "Which men?" Lanie considers it, closes the door on the security guard to really talk.

17. Home life.

Day over, Alicia returns to her small downtown apartment, her cellphone ringing again "The Bitch is Back." Alicia yells through the door: "I'm here." And...

...JACKIE FOLLICK (65) whips the door open. A blue blood force of nature. Always elegant, always domineering, an Ike-era widow intent on whipping her grandkids into shape. Jackie complains about Alicia not answering her calls. She picked up an application for a private school. Grace is still being bullied at school and David Jr. just brought home a new public school friend who seems "unclean."

Alicia patiently tells her she doesn't have the money for a private school as she runs the WalMart surveillance tape on her VCR. Jackie insists, Catholic schools are cheaper, but Alicia, needing another TV to run a second surveillance tape, goes in search of it.

GRACE (13) doesn't have it. A girl caught at that age between gawky and pretty, Grace is surfing her bedroom computer. Alicia asks her about the bullying at school. Grace rolls her eyes—grandma is being melodramatic. She whispers: Please, make her go away.

Alicia laughs, tells her to reprogram the ring tones, then goes to her son's room finding...

...DAVID JR. (14), a shy AV-kid trying to seem tougher than he is, with his new friend. A girl. TALIA (15). Pretty, but overly pierced. Talia is thrilled to meet Alicia, treating her and David like celebrities. Alicia shoots a scolding look at David Jr., then rolls his TV out—she needs it. David tries to close his bedroom door, but Alicia shoves it open again: uh-uh-uhhh.

Alicia simultaneously rolls two surveillance tapes on side-by-side TVs as Grace enters, eating a bowl of nighttime cereal: "What are we looking for?" Alicia shrugs, eyes the Walmart parking lot on the side-by-side sets. No pick-up truck. Alicia gets Grace's

help in rewinding one of the images to the security guard crossing the lot. Nothing interesting.

Unexceptional. Until...

...Alicia yells “stop.” Grace freezes the image. Alicia leans in toward the TV, smiles. Points at the frozen screen: “That!” It’s a plastic grocery bag blowing across the lot.

18. First witnesses.

First day of trial. Court 307. Alicia takes a deep breath then enters.

Matan questions the first prosecution witness. CINDY (30). The widow. Devastated. Teary eyed. Talking about the loss of the love of her life. She’s a witness used primarily to make a jury understand the emotional stakes. And...

...Alicia, sitting at the defense table, checks the jury. It seems to be working. The jury moved. All smart, college educated. Not a single crazy cat lady. Damn.

Matan also gets Cindy to undercut Jennifer’s claim that Michael was thinking of reconciling with her. Alicia objects: opinion, not in evidence. Bogira overrules her. Alicia frowns, looks at her conservative pant suit: damn, maybe David was right.

Time for Alicia’s cross. Alicia starts to ask Cindy why Michael had asked to stop custody proceedings if they weren’t thinking of reconciling, but she can’t get the full sentence out because Matan keeps objecting: “No foundation.” The Judge sustains. Alicia isn’t sure what she did wrong. She tries rephrasing it, but “Objection. No foundation.” “Sustained.”

Alicia just stands there, the court’s eyes upon her. Trial work is like a geometry of language. Alicia finally gets out one uninterrupted question, then sits. Not good.

Kalinda, watching in the gallery, isn’t happy, but...

...Matan and Sandra, at the prosecution table, suppress grins. Piece of cake. They call their next witness. A police detective. BRIGGS (50). The first one at the scene. He explains why they immediately suspected Jennifer. There was no fuel clip used to force the car over. Instead there was a nail driven into the rear tire, and the victim pulled over because of the slow leak.

Matan asks: Has he ever, in his professional capacity, heard of carjackers causing a leak in a tire to force a car to the side of the road? No. That defeats the whole purpose of a carjacking. You can’t steal a car with a flat.

Alicia eyes the jury. That’s working well too. Damn.

“Your witness.” Alicia stands, takes a moment, asks the Detective: “What’s ‘the pit?’”

Matan looks up, surprised at the question. Detective Briggs is too, pausing: Excuse me? “What’s ‘the pit’?” Matan objects. The judge asks on what grounds. Matan has no idea: just knowing he doesn’t like the look on the detective’s face. “Relevance.” Overruled.

Kalinda, in the gallery, leans forward. On to something here.

Alicia offers the detective helpfully, “Isn’t the pit the slang for where the police sink evidence they think is irrelevant to a crime scene?” The detective reluctantly nods: he’s heard the slang used before. “And when you refer to “putting something in the pit” are you referring to expunging evidence from the discovery offered to the defense?”

The detective tries to explain: at every scene there are irrelevancies: leads that look like they will pan out, but are never pursued by cops. Discovery only requires handing over the police reports and accompanying evidence. The stuff in the pit is as irrelevant as, well, “whether the stock market was going up or down at the time of the killing.”

Alicia asks: Was there any evidence at the carjacking scene that was dropped in the pit? Matan objects: “Prejudicial.” The judge motions for Matan and Alicia: In chambers.

19. In chambers.

Heated voices inside.

Judge Bogira asks Alicia: What’s going on? Alicia answers she’s putting on a case. Yes, but this isn’t the case put on at the first trial. Alicia nods simply: that’s correct. Matan interrupts: counsel is trying to prejudice the jury by suggesting there was police corruption where there was no police corruption. Alicia: that’s for the jury to decide.

Judge Bogira eyes Alicia. She’s tougher than he thought. He nods: Okay, Mrs. Follick is taking another tack. It’s within her rights. Let’s see where she takes this. But there are no new names on the witness list, so she’s going to have to pursue this with the witnesses she has.

Matan leaves angrily. Alicia starts to follow when Judge Bogira calls her back: Know what judges hate more than anything? Having their time wasted. Don’t waste my time. Alicia nods.

ACT THREE

20. In trouble with the partners.

Alicia is escorted in to see the firm’s three senior partners—Will, Dawna, and the bullet-headed founder of the firm, CORMAC—and they’re not happy. Dawna is downright pissed. Alicia’s task was simple. Follow the strategy of the first trial. Instead, she’s trying to make a name for herself by going with a risky ad-hoc strategy.

No, Alicia interrupts. The first jury didn't deadlock 6 to 6. It was really 11 to 1, and five caved just to get out of the jury room. This is a slap at Dawna. Alicia realizes she's making an enemy in her, but she has to explain why she changed the strategy. Cormac suggests the partners discuss it in private, and as Alicia is excused, we stay with...

...the partners: Dawna arguing they should put Cary in as first chair; bump Alicia down to second. But Will defends Alicia: she did what any of us would do: follow the winning strategy. Dawna just doesn't like her.

But Dawna interrupts calmly, logically: No, what she doesn't like is how she, Dawna, worked for the last twenty years to break the glass ceiling and become one of the town's first female partners, only to see a sweet little mom, like Alicia, who spent the last decade popping out kids, take advantage of the opportunities she created to botch a winning strategy. If Will wants to sleep with her, go sleep with her, but this is business.

A tense silence. Will calmly throws it back in her face: You're just afraid her strategy will beat yours. The two start to argue furiously when Cormac steps in, breaks it up. He'll be the tie-breaker. He'll decide who stays on the case.

21. The trace evidence.

Kalinda, meanwhile, flirtatiously convinces a crime lab technician not to wait for the subpoena, and show her the trace evidence from the scene that was kept out of the discovery. Okay, he relents, showing her what was found on the victim's clothing.

A half-dozen blonde hairs—short—a half-inch long.

They didn't come from his head. Or Jennifer's. Or anyone in the victim's household.

Reading the report, Kalinda finds it interesting that the hairs were found on the victim's left coat sleeve. Kalinda demonstrates: that was the arm the driver would've used to struggle with the carjacker. Are the hairs from the carjacker's head?

The smitten lab technician disagrees. The hairs couldn't have been from the carjacker. Why not?

They're not human.

22. Report to me.

Kalinda returns to fill in Alicia, but Dawna pulls the investigator aside. She wants Kalinda to report to her. Anything Kalinda finds out, she wants to know first so she can keep track of what damage Alicia is doing. What happened with the trace evidence?

Kalinda eyes Dawna, not liking her. She calmly lies: Nothing yet; we're subpoenaing the evidence. Good, Dawna nods: Show it to me first. Kalinda just smiles: sure.

23. Updating.

Meanwhile, Alicia, waiting nervously in her office, yells out to Suzanne to get Kalinda on the phone. But Suzanne isn't there, returning from a Starbucks run with Cary's coffee.

Frustrated, Alicia finally pulls her aside. You're *both* our assistants, not just Cary's. So do your job. But Suzanne is completely honest: *this is my job*. If I don't do what Cary asks, he can get Dawna to fire me. Before Alicia can argue with her...

...Kalinda pulls Alicia into her office to tell her about the non-human hairs. Alicia finds this odd too: Could it be from a pet? Did Jennifer or Michael have dogs or cats? No, they didn't.

Could it be from a fur collar? Kalinda nods, possible, but not a synthetic hair, it'd have to be real. She has a friend who works at a private lab who can tell her with more specificity what animal hair it is. She'll take it there.

Kalinda starts to warn Alicia about the office politics, decides against it. But Alicia brings it up: there's a chance she's being bumped to second chair. Either way, you should pursue this. Kalinda nods: sounds good.

There's a moment between them. Just a moment. Kalinda offers: Kill him in court. And we're...

24. The security guard.

...in court, the Walmart security guard on the stand. Very official looking, in uniform. His answers crisp, authoritative. Alicia eyes the jury: they're impressed.

Matan takes him through the night's surveillance video. There you are in the video, right? Yes, I do a circuit of the Walmart every hour. And at 11:00, I saw no pick up truck. Just me crossing the parking lot there.

Will enters the courtroom, sits in the gallery beside Kalinda who whispers, asking what the partners decided. Will shakes his head: not good. But he stops, sees standing at the back: a dignified suited man, tall, handsomely graying at the temples. GREG CHILDS (45). The new D.A. A Chicago Gavin Newsome. "What's the D.A. doing here?" Kalinda shrugs: "They're worried." Will considers this as...

...Alicia stands for cross-examination, wearing the black dress David suggested. She sets up two new video monitors next to the first one, and explains the first monitor is the surveillance from the night before the murder, the second the night *of* the murder, the third the night after. She freezes all three images at the moment the uniformed guard was crossing the lot. Is that you? Yes, the guard acknowledges. Alicia forwards one of the monitors to a minute later when...

...a plastic bag blows across the parking lot. Freezes it. She forwards the second monitor to the same time code, freezes it. The third monitor to the same moment, freezes. And there on all three monitors is an identical plastic bag blowing across the parking lot.

Alicia turns to the guard: “These are copies of the same tape, aren’t they?”

Matan looks up, appalled. The guard tries to deny it, but Alicia lets the three images run forward, side-by-side, the shopping bags blowing across the lot identically.

The jury furiously takes notes as Will starts to grin. He looks back at D.A. Childs exiting unhappily.

Alicia continues to question the guard, dragging out what the secretary, Lanie, told her. The weeks around the murder were so cold, the winds off Lake Michigan were so biting, and the superstore’s parking lot was so uneventful, the guard never made his hourly circuit. He never recorded the surveillance cameras because he didn’t want his bosses to know he never made the circuit. So when the police asked for that night’s surveillance tape, the guard just copied tapes from the week before. So, unfortunately there is no tape of the night of the murder.

Court over, Will greets Alicia happily. She just saved her career. If the other partners want to push her out of first chair, he will quit.

ACT FOUR

25. The D.A.’s office.

A morning strategy meeting at the D.A.’s office. The new D.A., Greg Childs, isn’t happy. He does everything politely, including this: ripping Matan and Sandra a new one.

How could they be beaten by Follick’s wife? Matan and Sandra argue this isn’t about her. She’s not smart enough for this defense. They’re really fighting David. He’s using his wife to embarrass the new D.A.’s office.

26. Chemical analysis.

Alicia and Kalinda visit the private lab doing analysis on the non-human hairs. Kalinda used to date the technician, RODNEY, a short, balding but brilliant scientist. Alicia smiles: wherever they go, Kalinda has dated someone; and none of them hold a grudge.

Rodney shows them the tests he did. He can’t trace the hair back to a particular dog, but he can tell what breed: greyhound. Also of interest: coating the hair is a substance called *alco ectolin*. A lotion for muscle and joint pains. Alicia sighs, concludes: we’re looking for an elderly greyhound owner?

27. Thinking it through.

Back at the office, Alicia updates Will on where they stand. Even if they had a rebuttal witness, Judge Bogira has held them to their current witness list. Is their case strong enough to send to the jury with a rebuttal?

Alicia worries about the detective. The jury believed him. It doesn't make sense that carjackers would target the victim's rusting Honda. Will nods: And why *would* the carjackers sink a nail into the rear tire? But Alicia pauses, getting an idea...

What if we accept it's not a carjacking? What if we don't fight the prosecutor's evidence pointing toward a faked carjacking? Will shakes his head: then you're arguing the prosecution's case.

No, what if someone else killed Michael and made it look like a carjacking?

Will begins to see where she's going: Jennifer wouldn't have had to find a way to pull the car over. She was *in* the car. She could just ask Michael to pull over. But someone else would've had to put the nail in that tire. Meanwhile...

...Alicia sees her assistant, Suzanne, returning to her desk, again with a Starbucks run for Cary. Alicia whispers to Will: Do me a favor; squeeze my left shoulder. Will, always-accommodating, smiles, complies as...

...Suzanne peers in, sees the closeness of Alicia to a senior partner. Suzanne considers it, knocks at the door: Sorry to interrupt, but did either of you want Starbucks? Alicia smiles: No, I'm fine.

28. Michael's enemies.

Kalinda and Alicia question Jennifer about what enemies Michael might have had. Any business problems? No. Any arguments with friends? No. Any debts? No. Kalinda suggests they phone Michael's widow, Cindy, to ask her the same questions. Alicia gets her cell number from the witness list. Phones. Cindy answers, and Alicia starts to reply when she stops, looks up at Kalinda. What? Alicia hears in the background...

...the yap-yap-yap of dogs.

Alicia asks Cindy where she is so they can ask her a few quick and simple questions.

29. Cindy.

The dog races. Greyhounds sprinting around a track, chasing a decoy rabbit.

Kalinda and Alicia start into the stadium when Alicia stops, points toward a staff parking lot. A red pick-up truck parked there.

The two approach, see a large tattooed man taking dog cages from the bed carrying them inside. Kalinda and Alicia follow, find the man working as a trainer: rubbing down the greyhounds after racing. Kalinda looks at the lotion: *alco ectolin*. The hefty trainer looks up to see them, asks: Are you looking for my sister?

Kalinda and Alicia smile and nod. Yep.

ACT FIVE

30. Back in the stand.

Alicia recalls Cindy as a witness, and questions the teary-eyed widow about her finances. Did she and Michael sign pre-nups? Matan objects, but Judge Bogira overrules: you can answer. Yes, they did sign pre-nups. And Michael had how much in savings?

More objections; more overruling. Cindy doesn't know how much. Alicia has all the data ready: Cindy would've lost Michael's half-million in savings if they divorced. Also Michael had a million dollar life insurance policy. So if Michael truly were thinking of reconciling, then Jennifer wasn't the one with the motive. Cindy was.

Cindy turns cold, argues that the police checked her out: she had an alibi for that night. But Alicia presents evidence about her brother's vehicle: a pick-up truck. She presents evidence of calls made from her brother's cellphone to her home five minutes after the murder. She presents evidence of Cindy putting money in her brother's account.

Cindy has answers for every charge but her cool starts to evaporate. She gets angry, as...

...Matan and Sandra just stare straight ahead, trying not to reveal what they're thinking: fuck.

31. Waiting for the verdict.

Alicia sits in her office, waiting for the verdict, taking off her shoes, rubbing her feet. Not used to so much time on high heels. "The Bitch is Back" rings on her cellphone. Alicia smiles, answers.

It's Jackie, cooking a roast, wondering whether Alicia will be home for dinner. Alicia laughs, then has to explain to an offended Jackie why she's laughing. It's the call she always made to David. Jackie just shakes her head, not understanding her humor. Alicia takes a moment, offers sincerely: thanks for stepping in, Jackie, when no one else would. Jackie quickly reacts the way she always does to gratitude: defensively: of course, she would; why wouldn't she help?

Alicia smiles: she'll be home by seven. She hears a knock at the door. It's Suzanne, the always-helpful Suzanne, offering pleasantly: the jury is in.

32. The verdict.

Silence. The bailiff hands the verdict to Judge Bogira. He reads it, nods, gives it to the bailiff to read out loud, as... Alicia takes Jennifer's hand under the table, squeezes it

comfortingly; and Matan and Sandra at the prosecution table brace themselves; and D.A. Childs stands at the back, calmly waiting.

“Not guilty.”

Stunned, not what she expected, Jennifer squeezes Alicia’s hand back, and jumps to her feet, crying. She can’t help herself, tears pouring.

33. Afterwards.

Jennifer hugs Alicia, thanking her. Free now. Able to get her life back. She hears a shout behind her. “Mom!” Jennifer turns to see her five-year-old daughter running to her, jumping in her arms, the two weeping.

34. Next case.

Will slips a bottle of champagne on Alicia’s desk, starts to leave when he bumps into Alicia returning. Will congratulates her. Alicia thanks him for standing up for her.

Silence. Romantic, tense energy.

Then Will starts out. Turns back. Oh, forgot something. She’s going to sit second chair to him on the civil case. And that’s it. Will exits. Alicia smiles. Starts to collect her things when she sees her screen-saver kicking in on her laptop. A montage of family pictures, dissolving: Kids at Christmas, kids at the Grand Canyon. And...

...there he is. David, smiling. And Alicia’s smile disappears

Example: The Grid (Pose)

TEASER OR COLD OPEN	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III	ACT IV
DANCE STUDIO (D)Vogue is going out of style, and Damon's dance class is empty. So is his paycheck.	BIANCA'S (A)Bianca and Fredricka are in a dispute.	BIANCA'S (F)Angel gets news she is the new Bebe girl.	FREDRIKAS (A,B,C,D,E)Pray, Elektra and the 3 pull off caper.	SNAIL SALON (A,B)Bianca & Fredrika meet face to face. Fredricka threatens
BALLROOM (B)Vogue is going out of style and Pray Tell notices Ricky down in the dumps because the "Lookey Loos" are gone. (B)PrayTell Gives pep talk.	BIANCA'S Bianca tells story of: (C,D,E) F/B of Lulu at strip club. F/B of Damion and Ricky on the couch. (B)Everyone is down. Pray Tell plans a "caper" to lift their spirits.	FREDRIKAS (C,D,E)The (3) measure house.	BIANCA'S (F)Happy, Damion discovers Angel and Lil Papi drug use. Dinner (ALL)Everyone together for dinner. Everyone down is up. (E)Now Ricky gives pep talk.	BIANCA'S (C)Bianca and Lulu share moment. Lulu feeling good. Re- enrolls in school.
	BALLROOM (B)Pray Tell reveals "caper" and Lulu, Ricky, and Damion must	DUNGEON (C)Lulu convinces Elektra to give money and helps		DOCTORS Hall (B,E)Pray and Ricky wait for results.

TEASER OR COLD OPEN	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III	ACT IV
	figure out how to pull it off.	Elektra in return.		Ricky makss pass at Pray.
	BIANCA'S (C,D,E) The (3) figure a plan to pull off caper but how do they get the money to do it?	NIGHTCLUB (F)Angel and Lil Papi celebrate by getting high.		Office (E)Ricky HIV positive
		ANGEL'S (F)Angel and Lil Papi say "I love you."		Hall (B)Pray consoles Ricky.
		HOTEL (A,B,C,D,E)Pray, Bianca, and the (3) prepare for caper. (E)Ricky confesses he may be HIV positive.		BEBE SHOOT (F)Angel and Lil Papi high at shoot. Ms. Ford scolds Angel. Photog set her up.

STORYLINES

A-Story: Bianca battles in the public eye with her rich, homophobic landlord Fredricka.

B Story: Pray Tell takes on the role as 'elder.'

C-Story: Lulu struggles with drug addiction and depression.

D-Story: With Vogue going out of style, Damon struggles to redefine his dancing life.

E-Story: Ricky is diagnosed HIV positive.

F-Story: On the high of being the new Bebe girl, Angel discovers the low of drug use and the modeling industry.

CHARACTERS

Here you will describe each of the main and minor characters in the episode. Please include the character's goals, problems, and humanity.

The Grid Breakdown: Abbott Elementary 1x01

TEASER OR COLD OPEN	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III	ACT IV
1 Counting fails (B)	9 Rug rolled up; where do kids sit? (A)	21 THs: the one rule (D)	36 Workshop; Janine walks out (B,C)	<i>No Act IV.</i> <i>TAG:</i>
2 TH: Janine intro (B)	10 TH: why a rug matters (A)	22 Schwartz fired; janitor covers (C,D)	37 Barbara defends her; all leave (B)	44 Janitor's TikTok following (C)
3 Old history book (C)	11 Barbara silences room; ignores invite (B)	23 Janitor teaches (D)	38 Boy asleep on rug; calling speech (A,B)	
4 TH: no money; stadium goes up (C)	12 Lounge: Jacob; trauma bond (B)	24 Ava: email me (A,C)	39 Stadium rug heist (A)	
5 Montage: 3 teachers (B,D)	13 Meet Melissa (B)	25 TH: Janine's emails (A)	40 Rugs in; "feel like a teacher" (A,B)	
6 Montage: fire; teacher quits (B)	14 All 3 need rugs; ask budget (A)	26 Gregory arrives (C,D)	41 Gregory stays (C,D)	
7 Axe throwing: "on top of things" (B)	15 Ava arrives (C)	27 How Ava got the job (C)	42 Rug laid; toilet fixed (A,B)	
8 Kid pees on rug (A)	16 Aide + rugs refused (A,C,D)	28 Rug email; kid throws up (A)	43 Ava thanks Janine for gift (B,C)	
	17 Barbara: none of you last 2 yrs (B)	29 Bathroom: meets Gregory (C,D)		

TEASER OR COLD OPEN	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III	ACT IV
	18 Jacob + Janine regroup (B)	30 Barbara: rugs aren't coming (B)		
	19 TH cut off: a fight (B,D)	31 PA promise; fake apology (A,B)		
	20 Schwartz kicks a kid (D)	32 Money went to Ava's sign (A,C)		
		33 Regroup; Gregory blames principal (B,C)		
		34 Emails superintendent (B,C)		
		35 Emails go to Ava; PA: workshop (B,C)		

Built from the Revised Network Draft (01/29/21). In that draft the school is Harrity and the characters have different names; the aired names are used here. A few cutaways (the axe-throwing studio, the trashcan fire) may not be in the broadcast cut. The act breaks don't move.

The Four Storylines

A — Janine needs a rug. The engine: a small, concrete, winnable want that stands in for everything the school doesn't have.

B — The young teachers want the old teachers' respect. Where the show actually lives. Janine and Barbara carry it.

C — Ava. Incompetence at the top, and the underfunding it makes worse. The obstacle and most of the comedy.

D — Replacing Ms. Schwartz. The shortest line, and the one that delivers Gregory. It resolves inside the episode; the others don't.

The Spine: Scene by Scene

Forty-four scenes, talking heads counted as scenes.

#	Where	What changes	Story
COLD OPEN			
1	Janine's classroom	Janine mid-lesson on sentence structure; a student hits another and she counts with no effect. Her authority is the first thing established, in the negative.	B
2	Talking head	Janine names herself and her tenure, and calls surviving the district an accomplishment.	B
3	Janine's classroom	The history book is years out of date; she's printed the missing presidents herself.	C
4	TH + stadium b-roll	No money in the district, while a stadium goes up nearby. The episode's thesis and its ending, stated in the first two minutes.	C
5	Montage — classrooms	Melissa in control, Barbara reading, Ms. Schwartz drowning. Three teachers characterized without dialogue.	B,D
6	Montage cont.	Jacob puts out a fire; a teacher walks out with a box. Turnover established as the norm.	B
7	Axe-throwing studio	Janine says she finally feels on top of things.	B
8	Janine's classroom	A student pees on the rug because the toilets don't work. The want is born.	A
ACT ONE			
9	Janine's classroom	She rolls up the rug; the kids ask where they'll sit now. The cost lands on children, not on her.	A
10	Talking head	Why a rug matters to a primary classroom. She sells the stakes of an object worth about forty dollars.	A
11	Janine's classroom	Barbara asks her to turn the music down, then silences the room in three words. Janine's admiration — and her invitation to drinks — both go unreturned.	B
12	Teachers' lounge	Jacob and his Twitter; Janine's talking head reframes their friendship as trauma bonding.	B
13	Teachers' lounge	The corner-store argument; Melissa introduces herself and asks whether the crew works with police.	B
14	Teachers' lounge	All three young teachers need rugs. Janine proposes going to the school budget — a private want becomes a group ask.	A

#	Where	What changes	Story
15	Teachers' lounge	Ava arrives, delighted by the cameras. Two talking heads set the room's opinion of her.	C
16	Teachers' lounge	Ms. Schwartz asks for an aide and is refused on cost; Janine's rug ask is refused with her; Ava holds Barbara up as the teacher who never complains.	A,C,D
17	Teachers' lounge	Barbara's case for resourcefulness over support, Melissa's guy for everything, and the challenge: none of you last two years.	B
18	Teachers' lounge	Jacob and Janine regroup. She won't accept the diagnosis.	B
19	Janine's classroom	Talking head insisting the young teachers are capable — interrupted mid-sentence by a student reporting a fight.	B,D
20	Hallway	Ms. Schwartz has kicked a student. Barbara's counting joke lands on Janine's advice from ten minutes earlier.	D
ACT TWO			
21	Hallway — talking heads	Three teachers agree on the one unbreakable rule. Comic runner doing exposition.	D
22	Hallway	Janine blames the missing aide; Barbara blames Schwartz. Ava announces the firing and a substitute, with the janitor covering in the meantime.	C,D
23	Schwartz's classroom	The janitor teaches. One shot, no dialogue needed.	D
24	Hallway	Jacob wants the district told; Ava refuses and offers an emergency budget request instead. She tells them to email her. Janine's engine finally starts.	A,C
25	Talking head	Janine's confidence about her own emails. Setup for how badly this goes.	A
26	Administrators' office	Gregory arrives to sub. Four separate character beats off one entrance. His talking head reveals he wanted the principal job.	C,D
27	Ava's office	How Ava got the job. The show's biggest single laugh doubles as the reason nothing at this school works.	C
28	Janine's classroom	She's writing the rug email when a student throws up.	A

#	Where	What changes	Story
29	Bathroom	Janine misreads Gregory, calls security, then trades students with him. The toilet plant is set here. Two leads meet over bodily fluids.	C,D
30	Barbara's classroom	Barbara tells her the rugs aren't coming and to do the job in front of her. Their disagreement is finally stated as two philosophies.	B
31	Barbara's classroom	The PA promises improvements. Janine performs Barbara's imaginary apology.	A,B
32	Schoolyard	The money went to a sign with Ava's photo on it. Every dollar spent. Barbara doesn't have to say anything.	A,C
33	Hallway	Janine, Jacob and Gregory regroup in defeat; Gregory names the real problem as the principal.	B,C
34	Janine's classroom	She emails the superintendent. Her stated motive isn't the rugs — it's not letting Barbara be right.	B,C
35	Hallway	Barbara and Melissa reveal that those emails bounce back to Ava. Ava's voice comes over the PA calling a trust workshop.	B,C
ACT THREE			
36	Teachers' lounge	The workshop. Ava works the room for criticism of Janine and everyone refuses, including a student she brought in. Janine confesses and walks out.	B,C
37	Teachers' lounge	Barbara defends her, admits she'd forgotten why the job matters, and leaves. Everyone follows. The turn.	B
38	Hallway	A boy asleep on Janine's floor, because the rug is softer than his bed. The rug stops being a prop. The calling speech, then Melissa's guy is invoked.	A,B
39	Stadium loading dock	They steal a rug, get caught, and Janine talks their way into more. The stadium from scene 4 pays the school back.	A
40	Hallway	Rugs carried in. Janine says she finally feels like a teacher — answering scene 7's version of the same claim.	A,B
41	Hallway	Gregory decides to stay. The D-story resolves and hands the series its second lead.	C,D
42	Janine's classroom	She lays the rug and reads to the kids; then fixes the toilet off a tutorial. Want granted, conditions unchanged.	A,B

#	Where	What changes	Story
43	Janine's classroom	Ava thanks Janine for a gift she didn't give. Barbara and Melissa did it for her, and won't say so to her face.	B,C
TAG			
44	Exterior — night	The janitor films Ava's TikTok, then reveals he's the one with a following.	C

Example: Barry — Loglines, Synopsis & Beatsheet

Loglines

A-Story

An aimless but deadly hitman, BARRY, gets assigned a new hit, and attempts to complete the task.

B - Story

Barry discovers acting and must decide if acting is his purpose.

C- Story (Runner)

NoHo Hank, a quirky gangster, wants Ryan, a struggling actor sleeping with his boss's girlfriend, dead.

Synopsis

A - Story

BARRY is an aimless but deadly hitman. Contemplating his purpose, Barry is given a new assignment from Fuchs, his job connect and friend. Barry goes to LA and meets NoHo Hank, an almost too friendly gangster, to give him his assignment. Barry finds when and where to kill his next mark, Ryan. After a series of detours, Barry and Ryan end up working together – as actors. By the end of the night, Barry and Ryan are almost friends. Unfortunately, NoHo Hank has been following Barry and is displeased with Barry and Ryan's friendship. Fuchs shows up the next day and presses Barry he must kill Ryan. "This is what you do. This is who you are." Barry regroups and finds Ryan – ready to kill – when he discovers Ryan is already dead - shot from a nearby car. Barry sees the killers and asks, "What's going on? As he approaches the car, the killers try to kill Barry, but they are too slow reloading, and Barry kills them.

B- Story

After killing his latest victim, Barry contemplates his life and takes his time going back to his normal life. Once he does, his hitman contact Fuchs admonishes him for it before giving Barry a new assignment. Barry tries to talk to Fuchs about his purpose – but Fuchs already has another job.

On his new hit job, Barry stumbles on Sally rehearsing. Confused and intrigued, Barry follows Sally into the acting studio and watches Sally fail and then kill her monologue. As he's watching Sally, Ryan (his hit) asks if Barry could help him out with his monologue. Barry doesn't know what to do – but helps Ryan (badly). When it's done, Sally asks Barry to come out with the actors. Barry refuses at first, but Sally convinces him otherwise. At the

bar, Barry meets the rest of the acting crew, but Sally is centerstage – he likes her. Before he leaves, she asks him to take Ryan home. Barry agrees. When Barry drops Ryan off, he and Ryan have a talk about acting. Ryan seems like a nice enough guy and he actually listens to and encourages Barry about acting (something Fuchs did not). At the end of the conversation, he and Ryan hug it out.

The next day Barry is informed he was seen hugging Ryan and his job is to kill him. Barry attempts to tell Fuchs about acting, and maybe it's his purpose. Fuchs tells him it isn't and to do his job. Barry agrees but before he does, he goes to see Gene, the acting coach, and get his opinion. When Gene tells Barry he is awful because he's not honest. Barry gives up and tells Gene everything. But Gene believes it's a monologue and sees 'the truth.' in it. He invites Barry to the studio.

At the end of the night, Barry meets a waitress and asks what's in her hand. She says a script, and then says, "I'm an actor" in which Barry replies, "Me too."

C- Story

NoHo Hank hires Barry to kill Ryan. Ryan is an actor who is sleeping with NoHo Hank's boss girlfriend. After he shows Barry who to kill, he follows Barry to see if Barry is doing his job when he discovers Barry and Ryan hugging it out. NoHo Hank tells Fuchs but decides Barry can't be trusted and kills Ryan themselves. When Barry discovers this, NoHo Hank and his armed man try to kill Barry but fail.

Beatsheet

A- Story

1. Barry doing his job, then contemplates his job.
2. Barry gets a new assignment from Fuchs.
3. Barry goes to LA. Meets NoHo Hank and gets a picture of the hit.
4. Barry stalks Ryan.
5. Ryan asks Barry to help with his monologue. Barry agrees.
6. Barry and Ryan share a moment. Hug.
7. Barry gets reprimanded for his time with Ryan.
8. Barry refocuses and finds Ryan... dead.
9. Barry sees NoHo Hank and someone else. They killed Ryan already, and they try to kill Barry, but Barry kills them first.

B-Story

1. Barry meets Sally and follows her into the studio.

2. Barry tries to leave, but Sally asks him out.
3. Barry gets to know the actors and falls for Sally.
4. Sally asks Barry to take Ryan home.
5. Barry talks to Ryan.
6. Barry tries to talk to Fuchs but fails.
7. Barry talks to Gene.
8. Barry tells the waitress he's an actor.

C-Story

1. NoHo Hank asks Barry to kill Ryan.
2. NoHo Hank follows Barry and sees Barry and Ryan together.
3. NoHo Hank doesn't trust Barry, and kills Ryan themselves.

The Grid Breakdown

TEASER	ACT ONE	ACT TWO	ACT THREE	ACT FOUR
(A)Barry does his job, then contemplates his job. (B)Barry takes his time getting back to his normal life.	(A)Fuchs admonishes Barry, then gives him a new assignment. (B)Barry tries to talk to Fuchs about his purpose. Fuchs already has another job. LA (A&C)Barry meets NoHo Hank, an almost too friendly gangster.	(A)Barry stalks Ryan. Finds when and where to kill him. (B)Barry stumbles on Sally rehearsing. Confused. Intrigued. ACTING STUDIO (B)Barry follows Sally in. Watches her fail, then kill	(B)Sally asks Barry to come out with the actors. He refuses. She convinces him. THE BAR (B)Barry meets the acting crew. Sally is centerstage. He likes her. (B)Sally asks Barry to take Ryan home. Barry agrees. DROPPING RYAN OFF	NEXT DAY (C)NoHo Hank tells Fuchs. (A&B)Barry is told to kill Ryan. Tries to tell Fuchs acting might be his purpose. Fuchs: "This is what you do. This is who you are." (B)Before he does, Barry sees Gene. Gene: he's awful because he's not honest. (B)Barry tells Gene everything. Gene thinks it's a monologue. Sees the truth. Invites him to the studio.

	(C)Ryan is sleeping with Hank's boss's girlfriend. (A&C)Hank shows Barry who to kill: Ryan.	her monologue. (A&B)Ryan asks Barry to help with his monologue. (A&B)Barry doesn't know what to do. Helps. Badly.	(A&B)Barry and Ryan talk about acting. Ryan listens and encourages him. Something Fuches did not. (A)Barry and Ryan hug it out. (C)NoHo Hank has been following Barry. He sees the hug.	(C)Hank decides Barry can't be trusted. (A&C)Barry finds Ryan, ready to kill. Ryan is already dead. Shot from a nearby car. (A&C)“What's going on?” The killers are too slow reloading. Barry kills them. END OF THE NIGHT (B)A waitress with a script: “I'm an actor.” Barry: “Me too.” Ends on (B)
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Primo: Episodic Breakdown

A scene-by-scene breakdown of the *Primo* pilot. Hover or tap the footnote markers for setup/payoff notes.

Teaser

- Primo is looking at a picture of a girl.³
- He is texting someone named Miguel, “How many uncles?”.
- The audience meets the uncles and Primo’s mom.⁴

Act I

- Rafa is shown to be smart and is considering applying to a college program, holding a blue sheet of paper.⁵
- Rafa discusses what to do with a friend.
- Rafa visits his Mom, who seems to be up to something and asks, “Is that the new neighbor, Mya?”.⁶
- It’s revealed that Mom knows about the college application, and the uncles begin to debate the idea of college.⁷
- Rafa and Mya have a conversation about college, where he explains his relationship with his uncles.
- The family throws Rafa a surprise party where he is presented with a sports jacket. He finally tells them about the application, which leads to another debate among the uncles.

Act II

- Rafa discovers that his Mom is broke.⁸
- Mom criticizes the uncles for being over the top, which leads to them fighting over a cake.
- Rafa confronts his Mom about the cost of college, but she reassures him that she’s “got this”.⁹
- Rafa throws his application away.¹⁰

Act III

- Rafa seeks out his “Construction Uncle,” who then brings in the rest of the uncles, resulting in chaos.¹¹

³SETUP: Establishes a potential romantic interest

⁴SETUP: Introduces the large, diverse family cast

⁵SETUP: Introduces the central goal/conflict of the episode—the application

⁶PAYOFF: The girl from the picture is revealed to be Mya

⁷SETUP: Establishes the family’s chaotic dynamic as the primary obstacle

⁸SETUP: Raises the stakes and introduces a major logistical obstacle to the goal

⁹PAYOFF: The financial setup is immediately addressed, leading to Rafa’s next action

¹⁰PAYOFF: In a moment of despair, Rafa gives up on the goal

¹¹PAYOFF: The family’s chaotic dynamic escalates to its peak

- Primo gets upset because no one is listening to him.
- Mom confronts the uncles, telling them, “What I want is for you to leave him alone and let him make up his own mind”.¹²
- Primo has a conversation with Rollie, who breaks down the situation and is described as “the Uncle we least expect”.¹³
- Primo makes the decision to apply to the program.¹⁴ The uncles show their support.¹⁵

Tag

- Apostrophe.
-

Student Storyline Analysis

The fill-in worksheet (A/B/C storyline loglines and scene beats, with Save as PDF / Word) lives on its own page:

Open the Primo worksheet

¹²PAYOFF: Mom’s mysterious behavior is explained; she wants Rafa to have agency

¹³PAYOFF: An unexpected family member becomes crucial to resolving the plot

¹⁴PAYOFF: The central conflict is resolved

¹⁵PAYOFF: The uncles’ conflict is resolved, and they now support Rafa

Your Pilot

Your Pilot

Everything you build for your own show lives here, in order: loglines → beatsheet → grid → outline → bible. Fill in the title card once and it shows on every worksheet.

The worksheets are interactive on the website (fvm2032-tvpilot.pages.dev/ws-home).

Loglines & Synopsis

One logline and one synopsis per storyline. Start with A, B, and C; add more if your pilot needs them.

This is an interactive worksheet on the website (fvm2032-tvpilot.pages.dev). In print it's a prompt sheet.

For each storyline (A, B, C, ...): a 2–3 sentence **logline**, then a half-page **synopsis**.

Story Builder: Beatsheet → Grid → Outline

Three steps, one page, one file. Write the **beats** for each storyline (short — a logline for each beat). Drag them into the **Grid** to build your acts; drop a beat on another to combine them into one scene. The **Outline** then lists your scenes in order, and that's where each one gets written out fully — dialogue, motivation, how it turns.

Interactive on the website (fvm2032-tvpilot.pages.dev/ws-story). In print:

1. **Beatsheet** — for each storyline, numbered beats, one action each, act breaks marked.
2. **The Grid** — Teaser / Act I–IV / Tag: place every beat, tagged (A)(B)(C); combine beats into scenes.
3. **Outline** — the scenes in grid order, each with a title and a full synopsis.

Series Bible

The five sections of the Bible assignment. Write in the boxes, or use them to plan and write the long version in a doc. The reminders point at the real bibles to study for each section.

This is an interactive worksheet on the website (fvm2032-tvpilot.pages.dev). In print it's a prompt sheet.

Introduction · Characters · Plot · Tone/Style · Series (Pilot + Episode 2 summaries, then Season 1 loglines).

Pitching

Perfecting the Pitch with Billy Ray (WGFestival 2021)

Watch on YouTube

Scripts

Show Bibles

Links & Further Reading

- TV Format Fundamentals — Writers Guild Foundation resource center. How the major TV formats are built.
- TV Writing — a huge free library of TV scripts and show bibles, organized by series.
- ‘Lost’ Illusions: The Untold Story of the Hit Show’s Poisonous Culture — Vanity Fair, May 2023. What a writers’ room can look like when it goes wrong.