

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 audiences' attention – Character Keep 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.

Guide 1: From *Writing The TV Drama*

Teaser and Act 1 Ends Around Page 17

Act 2 Ends Around Page 25 -30

Act 3 Ends Around Pages 35 – 40

Act 4 Ends Around Pages 45-44

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 motivates as the protagonist—the more equal the sides, the more suspense. See the world from your antagonist 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 was 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.

WRITING A SCRIPT: STRUCTURE

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

SUBCHAPTERS

- The Five Acts of Television
- Always Know Where to End Your Acts
- Mapping Out A, B, and C Stories
- Know What the Rules Are Before You Break Them

CHAPTER REVIEW

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

- Learn more about [structuring a script](#) for television.
- 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? Discuss with your classmates in [The Hub](#).

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 and around 900 pages.

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, what it took Marvel 6 ears 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.