The 5 Turning Points of a Script

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The Basic Components of a Screenplay

- All screenplay has three basic components: character, desire and conflict.
- The plot almost always is based on a protagonist or hero who is trying to achieve a goal that seems next to impossible to reach.
- Most movies follow this basic plot, which occurs over six stages with five turning points (indicated below).
Overview of Stages and Turning Points

1. The Setup
   a. The Opportunity
2. The New Situation
   a. The Change of Plans
3. Progress
   a. The Point of No Return
4. Complications and Higher Stakes
   a. The Major Setback
5. The Final Push
   a. The Climax
6. Aftermath

Alfred Hitchcock writing a screenplay.
Stage 1: The Opening
- This constitutes roughly the first 10% of a screenplay.
- This stage helps the audience get a sense of the hero’s surroundings and his daily life.
- This also must establish whether the audience likes the hero or not, whether they think he’s funny or boring, etc. They should form some sort of an opinion about the hero.

Turning Point #1: The Opportunity
About 10% of the way in, the hero must be faced with an opportunity that will create a desire which will be a gateway to the hero’s goal that the plot relies on. (Note that this opportunity isn’t the goal itself.)

Stage 1 of Gladiator: The film begins with Maximus leading his troops into battle.
Stage 2: The New Situation

- For the next 15% of the screenplay, the protagonist adapts to the changes brought on by the opportunity.
- During this time, he tries to figure out what is going on and tries to get a grip on things.
- The hero often enters this situation willingly and with excitement.

Turning Point #2: The Change of Plans

A fourth of the way in, the desire from the previous turning point becomes a specific goal.

Stage 2 of Gladiator: The dying emperor asks Maximus to take control of Rome.
Stage 3: Progress

- For the next 25% of the story, the hero is faced with a number of challenges, all which he is able to overcome.
- All seems to be going according to plan until he approaches an issue that requires him to either give up or commit fully to his goal.

Turning Point #3: The Point of No Return

This is where the hero decides he will give his all to achieve his goal, which is usually at the 50% mark.

Stage 3 of Gladiator: Maximus is captured and sold as a Gladiator. He slowly becomes powerful.
Stage 4: Complications and Higher Stakes
- For the next 25% of the story, achieving the goal becomes even more difficult.
- At this point, the goal becomes worth more than it originally was; the hero will lose much more than he would before if he fails.

Turning Point #4: The Major Setback
At the 75% mark, something happens that makes the audience think that all is lost.

Stage 4 of Gladiator: Maximus becomes a hero to the people and reveals his identity.
Stage 5: The Final Push

- At this point, the hero must give his all, use every ounce of courage he has, and push forward in order to achieve the final goal.

- This portion is full of conflicts and everything seems to come in your hero’s way.

Turning Point #4: The Climax
This can happen anywhere between the 90%-99% mark, depending on how long is needed for the aftermath. This is the final, biggest obstacle that the hero faces.

Stage 5 of Gladiator: Maximus plans to escape from Commodus.
Stage 6: The Aftermath

- Movies rarely end how it is expected to in the beginning.
- This portion can be very short or up to 9% of the screenplay, depending how much is left to be said.
- This shows where the hero stands now that all is said and done.

Stage 6 of Gladiator: Maximus dies, but he reunites with his family in death.
By having knowledge of these stages and turning points, writing an effective screenplay that is moving as well as engaging becomes easier. This is a safe structure to follow. However, this does not mean that there is no other way to approach screenwriting. This is simply a method by which you cannot go wrong.
TRUE OR FALSE:
One of the turning points of the film is when the protagonist is presented with a new opportunity.
TRUE
TRUE OR FALSE:
The setup makes up roughly the first 25% of the screenplay.
FALSE
It makes up about the first 10%.
TRUE OR FALSE:
In a properly structured movie, the story consists of 8 basic stages.
FALSE

It contains 6 basic stages.
The three basic components of a movie are character, desire and ________.
conflict
TRUE OR FALSE:
The setup gives a look into the hero’s everyday life.
TRUE
TRUE OR FALSE:

In every good screenplay, something must happen to your hero that makes it seem to the audience that all is lost.
TRUE
The climax of the movie can occur at:

a. 60% of the movie and onwards
b. 40% of the movie and earlier
c. 90% of the movie and onwards
d. precisely 21% of the movie
C. 90% of the movie and onwards
TRUE OR FALSE:
You are bound to these six stages; otherwise your screenplay cannot possibly be good.
FALSE
The major setback occurs at approximately the ___% mark.
TRUE OR FALSE:
By the end of the story, the things rarely turn out as expected.
TRUE