

Writing eight shorts or mini-movies to keep the reader (audience) turning pages

## What is a sequence?

A sequence in screenwriting is a SERIES
 OF SCENES within the Three Act
 structure that captures and advances a
 significant part of the plot and character
 development.

#### What is the 8-sequence technique?

• The 8-sequence technique is the writing of sequences -- a group of 6-8 scenes -- written as shorts or mini-movies with a beginning, middle and ending with cliffhanger-like last scenes leading to the next sequence.

#### Screenwriters like it because ...

- Parts are small and contained
- Can be written in one burst of energy
- Can be shaped and honed independently

#### Basic principles of 8 sequences

- It's a technique NOT a rule! If it doesn't work, don't do it.
- Each sequence must have a shape; be clearly defined
- Turn of events create interest
- Characters move from one state to another
- Gives idea of how things are hope versus fear
- Must sustain and increase tension
- Cliffhangers should make sense with entire arc of story

#### Act One – Sequence One

Status quo and inciting incident –

Establishes central character, his/her life, and status quo of the world of the story. It usually ends with the POINT OF ATTACK or INCITING INCIDENT, but this plot point can sometimes appear earlier in the first few minutes of the film.

Length: 8-15 pages

Other names: Set-up MC with flaw; Beginning to Inciting Incident

#### Act One – Sequence 2

- Predicament and Lock-In Sets up predicament that will be central to story, with first intimations of possible obstacles. Main tension will be established at the end of act. Sequence ends when the main character is LOCKED IN the predicament, propelling him/her into a new direction to obtain his/her goal.
- Other names: Event that Changes Everything; To the End of First Act

- First Obstacle & Raising the Stakes -First OBSTACLE to central character is faced, and the beginning of the elimination of the alternatives begins, often a time where EXPOSITION left over from ACT I is brought out. Since the character is locked into the situation and can't simply walk away, the stakes are higher - a lot more to lose.
- Other names: Brave new world; enjoying the new world

- First Culmination/Midpoint A higher OBSTACLE, the principle of RISING ACTION is brought in and builds to the FIRST CULMINATION, which usually parallels the RESOLUTION of the film. If story is a tragedy and the hero dies, then the first culmination (or midpoint) should be a low point for the character. If, however, the hero wins in the end of the film, then sequence four should end with him winning in some way; getting what he/she wants.
- Other names: MC high point/heaven; middle of second break

- Subplot & Rising Action The Second Act sag can set in at this point if we don't have a strong SUBPLOT to take the ball for a while. We still want RISING ACTION, but we're not ready for the MAIN CULMINATION yet.
- Other names: Bad guy returns; Building to end of Act Two

Main Culmination/End of Act Two –

Build-up to MAIN CULMINATION - back to main story line with a vengeance. The highest obstacle, the last alternative, the highest or lowest moment and the end of the main tension come at this point. But the audience gets the first inklings of the new tension that will carry us through third act.

Other names: MC's Hell/low point; End of Act Two

 Note: Since most midpoints and endings are paralleled, the PLOT POINT at the end of act two is usually at a polar opposite of those points. So if our hero wins at the midpoint and at the end of the film, then she usually has her lowest point here.

### Act Three – Sequence 7

- New Tension & Twist Full yet simple, brief establishment of the Third Act tension with its requisite exposition. Simpler, faster in nearly all ways, with rapid, short scenes and no real elaborate set-ups. The TWIST can end this sequence or come at the start of the eighth sequence.
- Other names: Dilemma and Decisions;
   Beginning of Act Three

## Act Three - Sequence 8

- Resolution Hell-bent for the RESOLUTION. Clarity is important. If they turn left, all is well; if they go right, the world as we know it ends. Not that we don't have complex emotions or ideas about what it all amounts to, but at this point we crave clarity. Will he get the girl, defuse the bomb, turn in his murderous brother and escape from the sinking boat surrounded by sharks?
- Other Names: Evidence of MC lessons learned; Climax to End

Give your scenes identifying names in a few words such as "MC at work," "MC shows off chops," etc. and list them for each sequence or mini-movie. Remember: 6-8 scenes per sequence.

The following descriptions are by Chris Soth:

MINI-MOVIE ONE: Our hero's status	quo,
his ordinary life, ends with an inciting	-
incident or "call to adventure."	

• MINI-MOVIE TWO: Our hero's denial of the call, and his gradually being "locked into" the conflict brought on by this call.	

• MINI-MOVIETHREE: Our hero's first attempts to solve his problem, the first things that anyone with this problem would try, appealing to outside authority to help him. Ends when all these avenues are shut to our hero. So in —

MINI-MOVIE FOUR: Our hero spawns a more grandiose, more extreme plan. He prepares for it gathers what materials and allies he may need thouts the plan into action only to have it go norribly wrong, usually due to certain vital information the hero lacked about the forces of antagonism allied against him.	it, nen

• MINI-MOVIE FIVE: Having created his plan to solve his problem WITHOUT changing, our hero is confronted by his need to change, eye opened to his own weaknesses, driven by the antagonist to change or die. He retreats to lichis wounds.	es
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• MINI-MOVIE SIX: Our hero spawns a new plan, but now he's ready to change. He put this plan into actionand is very nearly destroyed by it. And thena revelation.	

<ul> <li>MINI-MOVIE SEVEN: The revelation allows our hero to see victory, and he rejoins the battle with a new fervor, finally turning the tables on his antagonist and arrives at apparen victory. And then the tables turn one more time!</li> </ul>

# 8 Sequence Writing Example

• MINI-MOVIE EIGHT: The hero puts down the antagonist's last attempt to defeat him, wraps up his story and any sub-plots, and moves into the new world he and his story have created.

#### Additional information

- 8 sequences comes from the 15-minute reels used in theaters before modern camera technology.
- 8 sequences can be broken into Four Acts (two sequences per act)
- The number of scenes per sequence (6-8) is based on 2-minute long scenes.
- Analysis of beginning, middle and end can be done on each act, sequence, scene, beat within scene.

#### Resources

- www.thescriptlab.com
- www.screenwriter-to-screenwriter.com
- http://www.screenwritinggoldmine.com/fo rum/showthread.php?t=937
- http://milliondollarscreenwriting.com
- Spoonful Screenwriting by Michele Ryan