

## SOUTHWEST SCRIPTWRITERS – SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT TALK

### (NOTES BY ANDREW GRAHAM)

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#### THEATRE – Plot Development

- Theatre development is generally more **organic** than screenwriting – much of the plot detail **evolves** as you write it.
- Keeping the **structure loose** at the outset makes the writing feel **spontaneous** and **live**.
- What type of play is it? – Comedy, Tragedy?
- How many Acts, how many Scenes?
- The need for strong, **three dimensional characters**.
- The need for a **Central Dramatic Mechanism**
- The need for **Key Moments** - The Date – The Time - The crucial importance of key, decisive moments when the action of a scene or act takes place
- A **String Of Key Moments** - A play can be a string of these “turning point” moments in a person’s life
- The **Gaps Between Key Moments** - Editing time – in the selection of the key moments you choose, you condense and edit time.
- Playing with an **audience’s lack of knowledge** of what’s gone on between key moments
  - gradually revealing the **consequences** of what happened in the gap
  - Key moments can happen **between scenes or acts**, off-stage
- **Positioning** – The Butting Together Of Key Moments
  - The effect of **one key moment on another**
  - The **comparison between two key moments** in time – Audience draws a third conclusion
  - Key Moments - **As The Subject Of The Play**

- The content of the play could be about analysing what happened during a key moment in time (ie “Copenhagen”)

### **THEATRE – Scene Development**

- A dramatic scene – **improvised action and dialogue** based around **conflicting objectives**
- The need for **subtext** – unspoken desires
- Questions to ask:
  - How many **characters**?
  - What is their apparent and real **relationship**?
  - At **what stage** are they in their relationship? (ie beginning, end?)
  - How well do you know them? (ie age, sex, education, family background, likes, hates, secrets)
  - Where are they in the **time-line** of the drama?
  - What is the **setting, location**?
  - What **period** is the scene set in?
  - What **objects** are involved in the scene?
  - How are the characters **dressed** – how does this affect the scene?
- Length – remember that scenes need a **minimum length** in order not to confuse the audience
- Dramatic gear changes – need to happen **invisibly** within the scene
- Try and make sure you keep **action on stage**

### **Screenwriting – Plot Development**

- Story is to screenwriting what character is to playwriting
- Your story will have a main plot and possibly two, three or four sub-plots
- Make sure all your plots have a minimum of three units:
  - Set-up
  - Development
  - Conclusion
- Or, more likely, five
  - Set-up
  - Development
  - Complications
  - Climax
  - Resolution
- Look at the middle of your story (2<sup>nd</sup> Act) – Does it sag? Is it underdeveloped?
- The need for a story map – a basic outline
- One line per scene only
- Start with the givens – things which you know must happen
- Flesh out your story using scenes as story building blocks
- Link scenes together into a **sequence** – forming a group of scenes into a narrative chain
- A Sequence is made up of Scenes, **a Drama is made up of Sequences**
- You need **Set Up, Development & Pay Off** within a sequence, just as in a scene
- **The Beats of a Sequence are the Scenes themselves** – Once again, a minimum number of scenes is necessary to give a sequence a realistic pace
- **Key scenes** – a chain of scenes can provide the **build-up** to a key scene.

- **Establishing pace** – The length, rhythm and economy (or otherwise) of a sequence contributes to the mood, atmosphere and suspense of a drama – **Montage and Juxtaposition of scenes** – this allows considerable economy in storytelling (ie cutting back and forth between two separate scenes allows each scene to be relayed much faster) – it can also be used to create slower or faster pace
  - Cinema films generally build up their pace with more time and care, unlike tv movies or some dramas that often launch straight into the main story.

### Screenwriting – Scene Development

- Take one line from your outline
- On rough paper, work out what **actions** you need to happen within each scene – how many story beats do you need to make something credible? – what are the **minimum** number necessary?
  - Look at the **progressive development of emotions** – both within a scene, within a sequence and across the entire narrative of the film
  - Action is vital to screen story-telling
  - This process **stops you relying on dialogue** to put across your scene
- Then write the scene
  - Briefly describe any new **location** or setting
  - Briefly describe any new **character**
  - Draw the reader's attention to anything visually significant in the scene - **objects**
  - Describe the character's **facial expressions** – allude simply to their **inner state** – Use a look to replace a line
  - Use **humour**.
  - Be aware of the need for **conflict**, however mild.
- Beginning a scene (Coming in late) – Ending a scene (going out early)

