



Save the Cat for Novels.

*the fifteen beats,
retuned for prose.*

A complete working guide to the beat sheet as it behaves inside a novel: word-count targets for a 90,000-word manuscript, craft notes on interiority, chapters, and point of view, a worked example carried from Opening Image to Final Image, the mistakes that sink manuscripts, and a printable beat sheet to plan your own.

How to use this guide.

read it once for the shape, then keep it open while you plan.

Save the Cat began as a screenwriting method. **Blake Snyder's** fifteen-beat sheet (*Save the Cat! The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need*, 2005) told screenwriters not only what should happen but on which page. In 2018 **Jessica Brody** carried the sheet across to fiction in *Save the Cat! Writes a Novel*, keeping the fifteen beats intact and replacing page numbers with proportions of the manuscript, so that a 60,000-word romance and a 150,000-word epic could run the same structure at different scales.

This guide is One More Draft's independent walkthrough of that novel-shaped version, a companion to our Field Guide 02 on the screenplay sheet rather than a repeat of it. The beat names and order are the same; almost everything else changes. The targets are word counts, the craft notes cover chapters, interiority, and point of view, and the running example is a novel. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by the Save the Cat! brand, Blake Snyder's estate, or Jessica Brody.

Word-count targets throughout assume a **90,000-word manuscript**, the middle of the commercial range. Scale them to your length. They are targets, not laws, but they are useful ones, because a reader who cannot see page numbers can still feel a Catalyst that arrives thirty thousand words late.

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What changes at 90,000 words.

same fifteen beats. a different container, and a different reader.

A screenplay is a two-hour container, and the beat sheet's page numbers are a clock. A novel has no clock. It has a reader with a bookmark, who may read a chapter a night or the whole book on a flight, and who never knows what page the Midpoint is "supposed" to be on. What that reader feels instead is **pull**. Does something happen soon? Does each chapter end wanting the next? Proportions still matter, but they are felt as pacing, not as pages, which means the beats must be built into chapters rather than pinned to a stopwatch.

Three things the novel gives you that film cannot. **Interiority**: you can put the reader inside the protagonist's head, which makes the Debate and the Dark Night of the Soul the two beats that grow most in prose. **Point of view**: the choice of who narrates decides which beats are visible on the page and which arrive secondhand. **Chapter breaks**: the novel's only hard cuts, and the natural place to land a beat so the reader registers it as a turn rather than a passing event.

And three things the novel takes away. Nobody absorbs your Opening Image in a single glance; it must earn its keep as a scene. Nobody hears the Theme Stated unless a character says it in dialogue, because a theme in narration reads as the author leaning in. And the long stretches, Fun and Games and Bad Guys Close In, each run twenty thousand words or more, which no montage will cover. They need internal structure of their own, and most of this guide's novel-specific advice lives there.

THE ONE-SENTENCE VERSION

A flawed protagonist is knocked out of a stale life, chooses a new one, chases the wrong prize through the book's most enjoyable stretch until the pursuit costs everything, sits in the wreckage long enough to learn the lesson someone stated in chapter two, and proves the change in a finale the opening chapter quietly promised.

The engine: problem, want & need.

the beats are the skeleton. the protagonist is the pulse.

Brody's adaptation puts the protagonist's inner life at the center, which suits prose. Three things define that protagonist before the first beat is placed. The **problem** is the flaw, the habit or wound that shapes how they live at the start. The **want** is the external goal they consciously chase across the plot. The **need** is the internal change they do not know they require, the lesson the novel exists to teach. Acts one and two run on the want. The story turns when chasing the want at full speed brings disaster, and only the need can rebuild from it.

The **theme** is the need spoken aloud, one arguable sentence. In a novel you will state it once in dialogue, argue it for seventy thousand words, and prove it in action at the end. Get these four lines straight before you touch the beats. Half of the fifteen are defined by them, and a beat sheet with a vague need produces a well-paced book about nothing in particular.

BUILD THE SPINE IN FOUR LINES

- **Problem:** the flaw made visible in behavior by the end of chapter one. Readers should be able to name it before the protagonist can.
- **Want:** concrete and finite. A contract, a cure, a person found. If it cannot be lost on a specific day, sharpen it.
- **Need:** the change underneath, roughly the opposite of the problem. It is what the Dark Night teaches and the Finale performs.
- **Theme:** the need as a sentence someone could disagree with. Not "community matters" but "nothing worth hearing is made alone."

THE RUNNING EXAMPLE • MEET TAMSIN

Throughout this guide we follow one invented novel, an upmarket book-club story with the working title **Strike Note**. Tamsin Ferrier, thirty-eight, runs Ferrier & Daughter, the last bell foundry in the Pennine town of Wickersley, six months after her father's death. Problem: she does everything herself and calls it standards. Nobody has been inside the casting shed since the funeral. Want: the cathedral's commission to recast its bells, the only order big enough to keep the bank away. Need: to learn that she cannot cast, grieve, or live single-handed. Theme: nothing worth hearing is made alone. A bell, as she is about to be told, is only a weight until it rings in company.

Three acts, fifteen beats.

targets assume a 90,000-word manuscript. scale to yours.

The novel keeps the screenplay's shape: three acts, with act two split at the Midpoint. Single-moment beats (Catalyst, Midpoint, All Is Lost) are scenes, usually one chapter or less. Stretch beats (Setup, Fun and Games, Bad Guys Close In) run many chapters and hold most of the words. The right-hand column gives the planner's percentage and the approximate word count where the beat lands in a 90,000-word draft.

ACT ONE • THE OLD WORLD

01	Opening Image	~1% • ~1k words
02	Theme Stated	~5% • ~4.5k
03	Setup	~10% • to ~9k
04	Catalyst	~12% • ~11k
05	Debate	~20% • ~11k to 22k
06	Break Into 2	~25% • ~22k

ACT TWO A • THE UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD

07	B Story	~30% • ~27k
08	Fun and Games	~40% • ~22k to 45k
09	Midpoint	~50% • ~45k

ACT TWO B • THE WALLS CLOSE IN

10	Bad Guys Close In	~62% • ~45k to 67k
11	All Is Lost	~75% • ~67k
12	Dark Night of the Soul	~80% • ~67k to 76k

ACT THREE • THE NEW WORLD

13	Break Into 3	~85% • ~76k
14	Finale	~95% • ~76k to 90k
15	Final Image	100% • ~90k

In chapter terms, at roughly 3,000 words a chapter: Catalyst closes chapter four, act two opens near eight, Midpoint in fifteen, All Is Lost near twenty-two, Finale the last five.

BEAT 01

TARGET ~1% · ~1K WORDS

Opening Image.

the before photo, written as a scene, not a shot.

In film the Opening Image is one frame. In a novel it is the first scene, and it has to carry more: the protagonist's situation, the flaw in action, the tone, and the voice the reader will live inside for ninety thousand words. Its structural job is unchanged. It is half of a pair. The Final Image will mirror it, and the distance between the two scenes is the book. So choose a scene that can be revisited with one thing changed, and put the problem where the reader can see it, in what the character does and what the narration notices.

Prose adds a second contract: point of view. Whoever narrates the first scene, and however close the narration sits to their thoughts, sets a rule the reader expects you to keep. Decide it here. A first chapter that starts in a distant voice and then dives into one head has broken a promise before the story starts. And keep it short. One scene, one location, one telling action, and out.

ON THE PAGE

- Draft the Opening and Final Image together as a pair before outlining anything else. If the after scene will not come, the book is not ready.
- Let the flaw show in the noticing. What the protagonist observes, and what they refuse to, is characterization no film can do.
- End the first scene on a small unanswered question. Readers turn pages for questions, not descriptions.

WATCH OUT

The prologue detour. A prologue about someone else, somewhere else, three hundred years ago, is not your Opening Image. The reader's before photo must feature the person who is going to change.

STRIKE NOTE · TAM SIN

Five in the morning, the casting shed at Ferrier & Daughter, door bolted from inside. Tamsin strikes a finished handbell with a leather mallet and listens with her eyes shut for the hum beneath the strike note. Perfect. She logs it herself, packs it herself, and hangs the mallet beside her father's coat, which nobody has moved. The note dies against the stone walls. There is no one there to hear it.

BEAT 02

TARGET ~5% • ~4.5K WORDS

Theme Stated.

someone says the lesson. the narrator declines to hear it.

Around the five percent mark, a character other than the protagonist says the theme out loud, in passing, often as a joke, a complaint, or unasked-for advice. The protagonist brushes it off. The whole novel will be the argument that makes this sentence true, and in fiction it usually lands in chapter one or two. The requirement that trips novelists is that the theme must be **spoken**. Narration can think anything, so the temptation is to let the narrator muse the lesson. Resist it. A theme in narration is the author speaking; a theme in dialogue is a character the hero can ignore.

Interiority, though, gives you the deflection. Film shows a shrug. Prose can show the protagonist hearing the sentence, translating it into something harmless, and moving on, all inside their head. Write that mistranslation carefully, because the Dark Night of the Soul will need the original wording back, and the gap between what was said and what the hero heard is the size of the change to come.

ON THE PAGE

- Give the line to someone the hero underestimates: a relative, a rival, a customer. The vindication later is doubly satisfying.
- Phrase it so it stings the flaw specifically, not as a moral for the reader. The hero should want to argue.
- Keep it short and quotable. Seventy thousand words from now it must return word for word and be recognized.

WATCH OUT

A theme that cannot lose. If nobody reasonable would believe the opposite, there is no argument, and a novel without an argument is a long description. Make the counter-position something the hero currently lives by.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

Chapter two. Bet Halloran, the foundry's tuner for forty years, is retiring, and Tamsin has made her a farewell tea she will not sit down for. Bet, at the door: "A bell on its own is just a weight, love. It only sings in a ring." Tamsin, in her head, is already recalculating tonnage for a one-person shop. She files the line under Bet being sentimental and gets back to work.

BEAT 03

TARGET ~10% • TO ~9K WORDS

Setup.

the ordinary world, in chapters, with its own small tensions.

The first tenth of a novel, three chapters or so, establishes the protagonist's world: their routine, their relationships, their want, their flaw in action, and the things about their life that need fixing, the handful of specific lacks the Finale will repay. Everything act three needs is planted here: the skill, the object, the ally, the grudge. Prose has room film lacks, and the danger is spending it. Nine thousand words of routine is a museum tour. Give each setup scene its own small friction, a want and an obstacle, so the reader is pulled forward while the world assembles.

Also make the case that this life, left alone, would slowly suffocate the hero. The reader should feel that the status quo is a dead end before the Catalyst arrives, so the disruption reads as necessary rather than unlucky. And give the protagonist one moment of unmistakable decency or competence early. That is the save-the-cat gesture, and in a novel it buys the reader's company through a long, slow act one.

ON THE PAGE

- List the things that need fixing in your notes. Four to six, each concrete, each checkable at the Finale.
- Plant every act-three tool with a reason that belongs to the setup. A skill shown for its own sake looks like a plant.
- Use chapter endings. Three setup chapters should end on three escalating small questions, not three quiet fades.

WATCH OUT

Backstory instead of routine. The reader needs the pattern of the present life, because the Catalyst breaks that pattern. History can wait for the Debate and act two, where tension makes it digestible.

STRIKE NOTE • TAMSIN

Tamsin's routine: furnace lit by six, bell repairs, accounts at the kitchen table. Things needing fixing: the bank's letter with a date on it; Bet's empty bench; her father's half-filled tuning notebook, which she cannot open. Save the cat: she re-hangs the primary school's cracked bell for free and calls it a warranty job. There is no warranty.

BEAT 04

TARGET ~12% • ~11K WORDS

Catalyst.

something happens to her. the old life stops being possible.

At roughly twelve percent, the end of chapter four in a thirty-chapter book, an external event knocks the protagonist out of the status quo. The Catalyst happens *to* the hero; it is not their choice. Their choice comes at the Break Into 2. It must be concrete and irreversible. A letter that can be filed, an offer that can be politely refused and forgotten, is not a catalyst. Ask whether the hero could go back to chapter one's routine afterward and pretend. If they could, the event is not big enough, or not aimed well enough at this particular person's flaw.

Novelists lose this beat in two ways. They deliver it in summary, told rather than shown, because the scene seemed obvious. Or they let it drift to twenty percent while the setup luxuriates. Dramatize it in full, in scene, with the protagonist present, and land it on a chapter break so the reader closes the chapter knowing the book has begun.

ON THE PAGE

- Put it on the page in real time. The book's first detonation should never arrive as a phone call about something that happened.
- Aim it at the problem. The best Catalyst is the one event this hero is least equipped to handle.
- If it is running late, cut setup chapters rather than shortening the Catalyst. The event needs its full weight.

WATCH OUT

Merging Catalyst and Break Into 2. The Catalyst is the invitation; the Break is the reply. A hero who accepts in the same chapter skips the Debate and ten thousand words of useful reluctance.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

The cathedral's tenor bell, cast by Tamsin's great-grandfather, cracks during the memorial peal the band rings for her father. She hears it split from the churchyard. Within the week the Dean is in her yard: recast the tenor by the nine-hundredth anniversary, six months away, and if it rings true, the whole ring of eight follows. A two-tonne pour. Her father never attempted one without a crew of twelve. Wickersley's bells are silent until she decides.

BEAT 05

TARGET ~20% • ~11K TO 22K WORDS

Debate.

should she? prose's home turf, and its trap.

For a tenth of the book the hero resists. Should I? Can I? What will it cost? The Debate exists because a choice with no visible hesitation carries no weight; the reader sizes the adventure by the size of the resistance. This is the first beat that grows in prose. Interiority is built for it. You can show the argument turning over in the hero's head across days. That is also the trap. Ten thousand words of a character thinking is a stall. Externalize the debate. Let other characters take sides, and let the hero try the cheap exits first and watch them fail.

Use the section to price the stakes. Show the cost of going and the cost of staying, and tighten both. Backstory that the Setup was too busy for fits here, because the hero now has a reason to remember. And plant the B Story character's world, so their arrival after the act break feels like a door opening, not a new cast list.

ON THE PAGE

- Give each cheap exit its own scene, and a real chance of working. The reader must believe the hero could have escaped.
- Alternate interior and exterior chapters. A scene of thinking is followed by a scene of trying, and the trying changes the thinking.
- Let a voice argue for staying that a smart friend would agree with. Refusal must have a case.

WATCH OUT

The debate the reader cannot lose. If the hero has no genuinely good reason to refuse, the section reads as vamping, and a reader who has already decided is a reader skimming.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

Tamsin runs the numbers, then runs them again. She tries the cheap exits: subcontracting the pour to Halden Acoustics in Rotterdam (they will take the job and the Ferrier name with it); a bridging loan (the bank laughs); a solo night pour of a quarter-size trial bell, which she aborts when the crucible tilts and nobody is there to shout. The Dean gives her a week. Bet, on the phone: "You know what I said, love."

BEAT 06

TARGET ~25% • ~22K WORDS

Break Into 2.

she chooses. the door shuts on the old world.

At the quarter mark, the protagonist makes a proactive choice and steps into the new world of act two, a place that runs on different rules, where the old competencies stop working. The operative word is **chooses**. The hero must act with eyes open and a price visible. In a novel, this beat wants a chapter of its own, ending on the choice, so the reader can feel act one close. The sensation you are after is a door shutting. The chapter after this one should be impossible to mistake for the chapter before it.

Change the world physically if you can. A new place, a new role, a new set of people. If the setting cannot change, change the hero's standing inside it so completely that everyone treats them differently. And state the new goal in a form the reader can track for the next forty thousand words. Concrete, finite, with a date attached.

ON THE PAGE

- Make the choice cost something in the same scene: a bridge burned on the page, not promised for later.
- Have the hero enter act two chasing the want, not the need. The wrong fix, pursued with full energy, powers the middle.
- End the chapter on the act, not on the hero deciding to act. The deed, then white space.

WATCH OUT

Drifting across the line. If you cannot name the chapter where the hero commits, neither can the reader, and act two begins without them noticing they have entered it.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

Tamsin signs the Dean's commission. Then she does the harder thing. She unbolts the shed doors, takes her father's coat off its hook and folds it into a drawer, and pins a notice to the church door: FOUNDRY CREW WANTED, NO EXPERIENCE NEEDED, START MONDAY. Eleven strangers turn up on Monday. She has never taught anyone anything. The new goal is on the calendar in red. The tenor, cast and true, by the anniversary.

BEAT 07

TARGET ~30% • ~27K WORDS

B Story.

a new relationship, carrying the theme in its pocket.

Shortly after the act break, a second story begins, usually a relationship that belongs to the new world: the love interest, the mentor, the rival turned ally, the found family. The B Story is the theme's delivery vehicle. While the A story argues with the hero's want, the B character lives the need, speaking for the lesson from Theme Stated without lecturing. In many genres the B Story is the romance. In others it is a friendship or a mentorship. What matters is that the Break Into 3 becomes impossible without something this relationship gave the hero.

Novels can do something screenplays rarely can: give the B character a point of view. If your book is multi-POV, their chapters are where the theme gets argued from the other side. If it is single-POV, the B story lives in scenes that run warmer and slower than the plot, where the hero relaxes enough to be seen. Either way, give it a miniature arc of its own. Meeting, deepening, rupture near All Is Lost, repair that fuels act three.

ON THE PAGE

- Cast the B character as a native of the new world, someone the chapter-one hero would never have met or listened to.
- Let them challenge the flaw directly in dialogue. They can say what the plot cannot.
- Space B scenes deliberately through act two, roughly one chapter in three, so the thread never goes cold.

WATCH OUT

A B story the finale could survive without. If deleting the relationship leaves the ending intact, it is decoration. The hero's solution must be built from something this person gave them.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

Idris Wynne, tower captain of the cathedral's ringing band, arrives with six ringers who have never cast anything, on the theory that the people who will ring a bell should help make it. He counts the crew in and out like a peal. He talks while he works, which Tamsin considers a safety hazard. He is the theme with rope calluses, and he has decided the shed is a place people go.

BEAT 08

TARGET ~40% • ~22K TO 45K WORDS

Fun and Games.

the promise of the premise. twenty thousand words of it.

This is the stretch the reader picked up the book for. The heist is planned; the enemies fall in love; the new kingdom is explored. In a screenplay it runs twenty-five pages. In a novel it runs twenty thousand words or more, and no montage will cover it. That is the novel-specific problem of Fun and Games: it is the longest beat in the sheet and the one most likely to sag. Give it sub-structure. Plan it as three or four **sequences**, each a mini-arc with its own goal, complication, and result, escalating so that the section climbs toward the Midpoint instead of circling.

Underneath the enjoyment, keep the engine running. Each sequence should show the hero half-succeeding through the want while the unlearned need quietly accrues cost. Tilt the run toward wins if the Midpoint will be a false victory, toward losses if it will be a false defeat. And let the reader see the premise from the inside, through interiority, which is the pleasure film cannot sell.

ON THE PAGE

- List the five scenes the concept owes the reader. At least three belong between twenty-five and fifty percent.
- Give every sequence a chapter-ending turn. The reader should never be able to shuffle two Fun and Games chapters.
- Keep the antagonist glimpsed, not present. Their full weight belongs to Bad Guys Close In.

WATCH OUT

Premise drift. If the book promised a bell foundry and spends chapters nine to fifteen on a planning dispute, the reader feels cheated of the novel they bought. Pay the premise here or default on it.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

The shed fills with the premise: loam and horsehair moulds, a first small pour with eleven people holding their breath, ringers learning to skim slag, Idris teaching Tamsin the bell rope, the town arriving with scrap bronze in wheelbarrows. Sequence by sequence it escalates. A quarter-size bell, then a half, then the trial bell for the Dean's inspection, whose strike note comes up true. Tamsin has never worked in company. She is, unnervingly, good at it.

BEAT 09

TARGET ~50% • ~45K WORDS

Midpoint.

false victory or false defeat. the book turns serious.

At the center, the story pivots. Either the hero seems to get everything they wanted (a **false victory**) or to lose everything (a **false defeat**). False, because the win or loss belongs to the want, not the need. The hero is celebrating or grieving the wrong thing. From here the book changes register. Stakes go public, a clock starts, the fun ends. The A and B stories cross for the first time, so that the relationship complicates the goal or the goal complicates the relationship. And decide the Midpoint together with All Is Lost, because they are inverted twins.

In a novel the Midpoint deserves a set-piece chapter, staged somewhere with witnesses. It should also carry a private turn only the reader sees. Interiority lets the hero recognize something in the moment of triumph and refuse to act on it. That refusal is the flaw at full strength, and it is what makes the coming collapse feel earned rather than unlucky.

ON THE PAGE

- Stage it publicly: a ceremony, a launch, a wedding, a hearing. Victory and defeat need an audience.
- Start a literal clock on the page. A date, an ultimatum, a deadline the reader can count down from.
- Raise the stakes in kind, not degree. Private becomes public; a game becomes mortal; reversible becomes final.

WATCH OUT

The big scene that changes no direction. Test it. Could the chapters after the Midpoint have come before it unchanged? If yes, the hinge has not turned, whatever the fireworks.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

False victory, in the tower. The trial bell is hung and rung at the anniversary preview, and the Dean, in front of the Chapter, awards Ferrier & Daughter the full ring of eight, due in ten weeks. Idris asks her to ring it with the band. She declines, citing tuning notes. Because standing under it she heard, faintly, a wobble in the hum note that nobody else can hear. She says nothing. The clock starts at ten weeks.

BEAT 10

TARGET ~62% • ~45K TO 67K WORDS

Bad Guys Close In.

pressure from outside, rot from inside, one chapter at a time.

After the Midpoint, the walls close in on two fronts. Externally, the antagonistic forces regroup and press their advantage with real weight for the first time. Internally, the hero's flaw reasserts itself under stress, and their team frays. The internal front matters more. Villains close in fastest through cracks the hero opened. In a novel this stretch is another twenty thousand words, and it must not plateau. Build it as an accelerating demolition. Each chapter removes something the hero relied on, an ally, a resource, an illusion, so that All Is Lost arrives as arithmetic rather than ambush.

Interiority does double duty here. The reader watches the hero lie to others and, in the narration, to themselves. Keep the gap between what the hero says and what the narration admits, and widen it chapter by chapter. Multi-POV novels can show the antagonist's competence directly. Single-POV novels show it in consequences arriving faster than the hero can explain them.

ON THE PAGE

- Inventory the hero's assets at the Midpoint and schedule their removal, one per chapter, in rising order of pain.
- Let the flaw cost them the B story relationship, or nearly. The rupture here fuels the repair in act three.
- Give the antagonist their best chapter: capable, reasonable, and right about something.

WATCH OUT

External pressure only. Twenty thousand words of the villain winning goes numb. It is the hero's own unraveling, the secrets and the pushed-away friends, that makes the fall feel deserved.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

The bank hears the contract's payment terms and calls the loan early. Halden Acoustics lobbies the Chapter with a finished ring in six weeks. A wet October cracks two moulds. And Tamsin, hiding the wobble, starts redoing the crew's work alone at night, sends people home early, and tells Idris that a tower's timing is nothing like a pour. The crew thins to four. The narration keeps saying it is faster this way.

BEAT 11

TARGET ~75% • ~67K WORDS

All Is Lost.

the plan fails, and something dies with it.

At three quarters, the bottom drops out. The hero's plan, the act-two strategy built on the want, fails completely and publicly. The beat carries what Snyder called a **whiff of death**. Something ends here, a mentor, a relationship, a business, an old self, because the book is about rebirth, and rebirth needs a funeral. Even comedies obey this; the death is symbolic. The scene should mirror the Midpoint in reverse, the same place emptied, the same object broken. And the failure must trace to the flaw. Bad luck teaches nothing; the Dark Night needs a lesson with the hero's name on it.

Novelists flinch here more than screenwriters, because they love the character and have lived with them for months. Do not protect them. A loss the hero can shrug off produces an ending the reader can shrug off. Take the want, the B story, and the fallback, and end the chapter with nothing in reserve.

ON THE PAGE

- Make the death literal enough to photograph: a shuttered door, a cold furnace, a name struck from a list.
- Let the hero's own worst habit pull the trigger. The reader should see chapter one arriving at this exact place.
- Keep the chapter tight. All Is Lost is a blow, not a stretch. The sitting with it comes next.

WATCH OUT

The cushioned fall. If the hero keeps a plan B, a powerful friend, or an untouched sanctuary, the reader does the sum and stops worrying. Audit what they still hold. Take it.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

The tenor pour, attempted with four people and a crucible that needs twelve. Halfway through, the metal chills in the runner; Tamsin tries to force it and the mould splits, bronze flooding the pit. The youngest ringer is burned, not badly, badly enough. The Dean withdraws the commission to Halden by letter. That night, for the first time in a hundred and forty years, the Ferrier furnace goes cold. She finds the coat in the drawer and cannot put it on.

BEAT 12

TARGET ~80% • ~67K TO 76K WORDS

Dark Night of the Soul.

sitting in the wreckage until the lesson lands.

For a stretch of chapters, the hero simply grieves. No plans, no rescues. The book slows on purpose, and the reader sits at the bottom with the protagonist. This beat is why All Is Lost had to be total. With the want dead and the armor useless, there is nothing left to do but hear the theme. The sentence from Theme Stated returns, remembered, re-read, overheard, and this time it lands. Of all fifteen beats, this is the one prose does best. A novel can spend eight thousand words inside a mind at its lowest and make every one of them count.

Which means resisting the screenplay reflex to compress it. Duration is the point. Transformation must be witnessed to be believed, and the reader's patience here buys their joy at the Break Into 3. Strip the setting to match the state, an empty flat, a parked car, a childhood room. Then, in the last pages of the beat, let the hero's eye land on the object that will spark the answer.

ON THE PAGE

- Bring the theme back through an object or echo, never a speech. The gift, the notebook, the parent's phrase replayed.
- Write the mistranslation from Theme Stated being corrected, inside the hero's head, in their own words.
- End the beat on the hero looking at something, not deciding something. The decision is the next beat's job.

WATCH OUT

The half-page recovery. A hero who bounces from ruin to inspiration in a paragraph reads as unbreakable, and unbreakable people are unreadable. Nothing was ever at risk.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

Days in the cold shed. Tamsin finally opens her father's tuning notebook and finds that every bell he ever cast is logged with names, dozens of them, four decades of crews. The last entry, from the year he was ill, lists one initial: T. He had been waiting for her to bring people in. A bell on its own is just a weight. She has been ringing alone since the funeral, and calling it standards.

BEAT 13

TARGET ~85% • ~76K WORDS

Break Into 3.

the answer: A story plus B story, combined at last.

Inspiration strikes, but not from nowhere. The Break Into 3 is a **synthesis**. Something from the B story (the lesson, the relationship, the gift) combines with something from the A story (the goal, the skill, the unfinished business) to reveal a plan the hero could not have seen before the change. The old world of act one and the upside-down world of act two resolve into a third way. The plan must run on the need. Whatever the hero attempts now should be something the chapter-one version, flaw intact, would never have dared or understood.

Keep it to one chapter, and keep it bright. The realization is a spark; the Finale is where it burns. Novels can let the reader assemble the answer a paragraph before the hero does, through interiority that circles the solution before naming it. That half-beat of anticipation is one of fiction's cleanest pleasures. Use it, and then move.

ON THE PAGE

- Audit the ingredients. Every part of the plan must be planted material: a Setup tool, a B story gift, a Fun and Games lesson.
- Reunite or invoke the B character here, in scene. Their thread is the fuse.
- Make the first act of the new plan a visible reversal of the flaw. Not a thought. A deed.

WATCH OUT

The rescue by coincidence. A letter, a lottery win, a villain's blunder. If the way forward arrives without the hero changing, the change was decorative, and the reader will feel the substitution.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

The synthesis, standing in the empty pit. A two-tonne pour needs twelve hands moving in exact time, and she has spent ten weeks watching Idris make twelve people move in exact time every Thursday night. A peal is a pour. She goes not to the shed but to the tower during practice, and in front of the whole band, asks for help. Then she rings the Dean and tells him about the wobble herself.

BEAT 14

TARGET ~95% • ~76K TO 90K WORDS

Finale.

the new self, executed under maximum pressure.

The hero runs the new plan against the antagonist at full strength, and both stories, external and internal, resolve in one sequence of action. The five-part finale from later Save the Cat practice is worth borrowing, because it turns fourteen thousand words into a shape: **gather the team**, **execute the plan**, the **high tower surprise** (a twist the plan did not cover), **dig deep down** (the hero, plan gone, acts from transformed character alone), and the **execution of the new plan**. The surprise is load-bearing. A finale that goes to plan proves the plan. Remove it and the hero must prove themselves.

Prose lets you keep the reader inside the hero at the decisive moment. Use it sparingly. In the climax itself, shorten sentences, cut interior commentary, and let action carry meaning the narration has spent the book earning. Then pay the things that needed fixing, one by one. Readers keep receipts from chapter three.

ON THE PAGE

- Resolve want and need explicitly. Classically the hero earns the need and receives the want transformed, or lets it go gladly.
- Give the antagonist a real chance to win the last round. Finales are only as large as the opposition's best move.
- Put the decisive act in the hero's own hands. If a friend, a lawyer, or luck could perform it, restructure.

WATCH OUT

The summarized finale. Exhausted novelists tell the climax in retrospect from the epilogue. The reader has waited eighty thousand words to be in the room. Put them there.

STRIKE NOTE • TAMSIN

Gather: the band, the town's scrap bronze, Bet out of retirement to tune. Execute: the pour, called like a peal, twelve hands on the count, and the tenor comes out whole. High tower surprise: Halden's ring arrives early and the Chapter will vote on which to hang, while Bet's ear finds the tenor a quarter-tone flat with no time to machine it. Dig deep: Tamsin tunes it by ringing it against the other seven, by ear, in company. The Chapter votes in the tower, listening.

BEAT 15

TARGET 100% • ~90K WORDS

Final Image.

the after photo. proof the promise was kept.

The last scene mirrors the first. Same world, same protagonist, changed. The Final Image is the Opening Image's answer, and together they are the novel's thesis in two scenes. It needs little space, because the whole book has been the caption. Choose transformation over triumph. Not the hero celebrating, but the hero *living differently*, doing in the last scene the thing the first scene showed they could not. After a finale at full volume, quiet lands loudest, and gives the reader the final beat of the argument to complete themselves.

In prose, the mirror can be built at the sentence level. Reuse the opening's structure, its first noun, its rhythm, with one element turned. Readers may not consciously recognize the echo, but they feel the book close like a lid fitting. Then stop. Every page after the final image is paid for in the reader's goodwill.

ON THE PAGE

- Reuse the opening scene's grammar, place, action, point of view, with one decisive change. The echo does the work.
- Show the flaw's opposite as habit, not effort. Change that looks easy reads as permanent.
- End within a page or two of the climax's resolution. One epilogue at most, and only if it is the image.

WATCH OUT

The epilogue pile-up. Five endings, each tying a thread the Finale already tied. Pick the one scene that proves the theme and close the book while the reader wants one more page.

STRIKE NOTE • TAM SIN

The tower, the anniversary morning, the first full peal. Tamsin on the tenor rope, eyes shut, listening for the hum beneath the strike note of a bell she made. It is there, and seven other bells are carrying it. Below, the shed doors stand open; the coat is on the new apprentice, who is too small for it. The note does not die against a wall. It goes out over the town, and the town hears it.

Adapting the frame.

genre, length, series, and the second point of view.

GENRE

The beats specify pressure, not content, so the same sheet carries romance, mystery, fantasy, and literary fiction. What changes is which beat the genre owns. In romance the B Story is the love story and the Midpoint is usually the first real intimacy; in mystery the Catalyst is the body and the Midpoint is the false solution; in fantasy the Break Into 2 is a literal border and Fun and Games is the world itself. Identify your genre's signature beat and give it the most words.

LENGTH

Percentages hold at any length. What scales is the stretch beats. A 60,000-word romance runs Fun and Games in twelve thousand words; a 140,000-word epic runs it in thirty-five thousand and needs four or five sequences instead of three. The single-moment beats (Catalyst, Midpoint, All Is Lost) barely change size at all. Novellas compress the Debate and the Dark Night hardest, so protect those two on purpose.

SERIES

Each book runs its own fifteen beats to a satisfying close. The series carries a second, slower sheet on top. The first book's Final Image is the series' Opening Image, the series Midpoint lands in the middle volume, and the series All Is Lost belongs to the penultimate book. Plan both sheets, and never let the book-level Finale be a cliffhanger. Readers forgive an unresolved series. They do not forgive an unresolved book.

MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW

One protagonist owns the beat sheet. Secondary viewpoint characters get compressed versions of it, and their big beats should land near the main character's, so that the Midpoint and All Is Lost feel like the whole book turning rather than one thread. The B character's POV, if you give them one, is the theme argued from the other side. If two leads truly share the book, as in a dual-POV romance, give each a full sheet and braid them chapter by chapter, with the Midpoint and Finale shared.

Seven ways novels go wrong.

read this list again at the end of every draft.

- **1. The prologue detour.** An opening about someone else, somewhere else, before the hero arrives. Fix: cut it, or move it after the Opening Image so the reader meets the protagonist first.
- **2. The narrated theme.** The lesson mused by the narrator instead of spoken by a character. Fix: give the sentence to someone the hero underestimates, in dialogue, and let the hero mishear it.
- **3. The interior Debate.** Ten thousand words of thinking. Fix: alternate scenes of trying with scenes of thinking, and give each cheap exit its own chapter.
- **4. The shapeless Fun and Games.** Twenty thousand words of premise with no climb. Fix: plan it as three or four sequences with rising goals, each ending on a turn.
- **5. The beat between chapters.** Turning points landing mid-chapter where readers do not register them. Fix: move the Catalyst, Break Into 2, Midpoint, and All Is Lost to chapter endings.
- **6. The cushioned fall.** All Is Lost with a fallback intact and nothing dead. Fix: take the want, the B story, and the safety net; add a funeral, literal or symbolic.
- **7. The finale in summary.** A climax reported from the epilogue. Fix: put the reader in the room, in scene, with the hero's hand on the decisive act.

THE MASTER DIAGNOSTIC

For any chapter that feels dead, name the beat it serves, and name the single thing that is different at its last line from its first. A chapter that serves no beat and changes nothing is a chapter the reader will skim. In a novel, skimming is how books get put down.

Your beat sheet.

print this page. one line per beat is enough to start.

WANT / NEED / THEME

01 OPENING IMAGE 1%

02 THEME STATED 5%

03 SETUP 1-10%

04 CATALYST 12%

05 DEBATE 12-25%

06 BREAK INTO 2 25%

07 B STORY 30%

08 FUN AND GAMES

25-50%

09 MIDPOINT 50%

10 BAD GUYS CLOSE IN 50-75%

11 ALL IS LOST 75%

12 DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL 75-85%

13 BREAK INTO 3 85%

14 FINALE 85-100%

15 FINAL IMAGE 100%

Keep going.

the paper version ends here. the fill-in version doesn't.

This entire beat sheet exists as a **free interactive planner** at One More Draft, with the same fifteen beats and a text box under each one that saves as you type. Read the beat, draft your novel's version of it right on the page, and walk away with a complete outline in an afternoon.

onemoredraft.com/guides/save-the-cat-novel

One More Draft is a complete workshop for writers: a distraction-free manuscript editor with book formatting for ebook and print, story planning tools for characters, beats, and worlds, industry-standard screenplay formatting, and Quill, our resident writing partner, when you want a second pair of eyes. The editor is free, and there is a free desktop app for Windows.

MORE FREE FRAMEWORK GUIDES

- Save the Cat · the fifteen-beat screenplay standard
- The Hero's Journey · the monomyth, demystified
- Three-Act Structure · the load-bearing classic
- Romancing the Beat · the romance arc, beat by beat
- The Story Circle · eight steps around the wheel of change
- Kishōtenketsu · four-act structure without conflict
- Mystery / Detective · the fair-play whodunit beat sheet
- The TV Pilot · the first episode, beat by beat

All free, all fill-in-able, at **onemoredraft.com/guides**.



ONE MORE DRAFT

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