



Save the Cat.

*the fifteen-beat
screenplay standard.*

A complete working guide to Blake Snyder's beat sheet: all fifteen beats with page targets, a worked example carried from Opening Image to Final Image, the mistakes that sink screenplays, 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 is the story structure created by screenwriter **Blake Snyder** in his book *Save the Cat! The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need* (2005). His fifteen-beat sheet, which screenwriters call "the BS2," became the most widely used planning tool in Hollywood because it does something no earlier framework did. It names not just the beats but their **page numbers**, pacing a two-hour film with almost mechanical precision.

This guide is One More Draft's independent, expanded walkthrough of what each beat is for, how to write it, where drafts usually go wrong, and a running example so you can watch the machinery move. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by the Save the Cat! brand or Blake Snyder's estate. If the structure clicks for you, Snyder's book remains the fastest, funniest read in screenwriting.

Percentages here follow the beat sheet's classic proportions (with the traditional page targets for a 110-page script noted along the way). They are targets, not laws. But here the numbers matter, because readers raised on this sheet can feel a late Catalyst the way a drummer feels a dropped beat.

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Why a beat sheet took over Hollywood.

movies are bought, made, and judged against a clock.

A feature film is a fixed container of roughly two hours, at roughly one page of script per minute of screen time. That constraint is what makes Snyder's system work. Where older frameworks describe a story's shape in the abstract, the beat sheet pins each turning point to a place in the container. The Catalyst sits near page 12, the Midpoint at 55, All Is Lost at 75. Professional readers internalize those positions so deeply that a script which drifts from them *feels* slow or rushed before the reader could tell you why.

The title comes from Snyder's most famous piece of advice. Early in the film, let the hero do something likeable, save a cat, so the audience signs on for the ride. But the book's real legacy is the fifteen beats, and the insight underneath them: a screenplay is a sequence of **promises and payments**. The Opening Image promises a transformation the Final Image must pay off. The premise promises fun the Fun and Games section must deliver. Theme Stated promises a lesson the Dark Night of the Soul must collect.

Two things the beat sheet is not. It is not a formula that writes the movie for you. The beats say *when* things must turn, never *what* happens, which is why films as different as a haunted-house picture and a romantic comedy can share the identical skeleton. And it is not only for screenwriters. Novelists use it constantly, because a chapter map with fifteen load-bearing points is a gift in any medium. (We cover the conversion on page 21.)

THE ONE-SENTENCE VERSION

A flawed hero is knocked out of a broken status quo, chases the wrong thing through an upside-down world until it costs them everything, learns the lesson the story stated on page five, and proves the change in a finale the opening image already promised.

The engine: want, need & theme.

the beats are a clock. this is what makes it tick.

Every Save the Cat story runs on the gap between two things. The **want** is the external goal the hero consciously chases - the promotion, the trophy, the escape. The **need** is the internal change they don't know they require - the lesson. Acts one and two are powered by the want; the story turns when pursuing the want at full speed delivers disaster, and only the need can rebuild from the rubble. The **theme** is the need said out loud, a single arguable sentence the whole film debates.

Get these three straight before you touch the beats, because at least five beats are defined by them. Theme Stated names the theme, the Debate argues it, the Midpoint fakes its resolution, the Dark Night finally teaches it, and the Finale proves it under fire. A beat sheet with a fuzzy theme produces a structurally perfect script about nothing.

BUILD THE SPINE IN FOUR LINES

- **Want:** concrete, visible, filmable. If you can't photograph the hero achieving it, sharpen it.
- **Need:** the human change underneath, roughly opposite to the flaw the Set-Up will display.
- **Theme:** one arguable sentence. Not "family matters" but "the family you choose owes you nothing, and that's why it counts."
- **Flaw:** the behavior that proves the need unmet - visible in the first ten pages, fatal by page 75.

THE RUNNING EXAMPLE • MEET PRIYA

*Throughout this guide we follow one invented screenplay - a whistleblower thriller with a comic streak, working title **Acts of God**. Priya is a star insurance claims investigator famous for denying claims by the book. Her want: the regional director job, promised if she closes the year clean. Her need: to learn that the rules only protect the people who wrote them. When a flooded town's claims land on her desk, she discovers the "act of God" was an act of her own company, and the paper trail has her signature on it. Flaw on display from scene one: when the rules and the right thing disagree, Priya picks the rules, every time. For now.*

Three acts, fifteen beats.

page targets assume the classic 110-page script.

The fifteen beats sit inside the familiar three acts, with act two split at the Midpoint into an "upside-down world" half and a "walls closing in" half. Single-moment beats (Catalyst, Midpoint, All Is Lost) are points; multi-scene beats (Set-Up, Fun and Games, Bad Guys Close In) are stretches.

ACT ONE • THE THESIS WORLD

01	Opening Image	~1% • p1
02	Theme Stated	~5% • p5
03	Set-Up	~10% • p1-10
04	Catalyst	~12% • p12
05	Debate	~20% • p12-25
06	Break Into Two	~25% • p25

ACT TWO A • THE ANTITHESIS WORLD

07	B Story	~30% • p30
08	Fun and Games	~40% • p30-55
09	Midpoint	~50% • p55

ACT TWO B • THE WALLS CLOSE IN

10	Bad Guys Close In	~60% • p55-75
11	All Is Lost	~75% • p75
12	Dark Night of the Soul	~80% • p75-85

ACT THREE • THE SYNTHESIS WORLD

13	Break Into Three	~85% • p85
14	Finale	~95% • p85-110
15	Final Image	100% • p110

BEAT 01

TARGET ~1% • PAGE 1

Opening Image.

the "before" photo. page one is a promise.

The first thing the audience sees is a snapshot of the hero's world - and, secretly, a contract. The Opening Image establishes tone, mood, and stakes, but its structural job is to be one half of a pair. The Final Image will rhyme with it, and the distance between the two pictures is the movie. Choose an image that can transform. A hero alone at a crowded party can become a hero at the center of a chosen family; a pristine, silent office can become a lived-in mess.

Because film is a visual medium, this beat is literal, an image rather than a scene of exposition. In a novel, it is the opening paragraph's equivalent - the first concrete picture you put in the reader's head. Either way, resist the throat-clearing draft that opens on weather, waking up, or a dream. Open on the flaw made visible.

ON THE PAGE

- Design Opening and Final Image together, as a before-and-after pair. If you can't name the after, you don't know your movie yet.
- Put the hero's flaw in the frame - behavior, not narration. One telling action beats a page of voice-over.
- Set the tone contract honestly. A comedy must be funny on page one; a thriller must already be ticking.

WATCH OUT

An opening image chosen for beauty instead of meaning. A gorgeous drone shot of the city promises nothing. The image must encode the status quo that the story exists to break.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

A flooded living room, water lapping at family photos. Priya, in waders, dictates calmly into a recorder: "Claim denied. Water damage, clause 14-C, act of God." Behind her, the family watches from the stairs. She never looks up.

BEAT 02

TARGET ~5% • PAGE 5

Theme Stated.

someone says the lesson. the hero isn't listening.

Around page five, a character, usually not the hero, says the theme out loud, often in passing, often as a joke or a jab. The hero shrugs it off, because the hero is not ready to hear it; the entire movie will be the argument that makes this sentence true. It is the story's thesis planted where the audience can't miss it in hindsight and rarely notices it in the moment.

The craft is in the disguise. A theme delivered as a lecture reads as authorial; a theme delivered as a taunt, a toast, a fortune cookie, or an offhand complaint feels like life. Keep it short enough to remember and specific enough to argue with. The Dark Night of the Soul will need to quote it, verbatim or nearly, seventy-five pages from now.

ON THE PAGE

- Put the words in the mouth of someone the hero underestimates - a kid, a rival, a parent. Doubly satisfying when the source is vindicated.
- Phrase it as a challenge to the hero's flaw, not a moral for the audience. It should sting a little.
- Let the hero deflect with the exact attitude that will fail at All Is Lost. The deflection characterizes; the echo pays off.

WATCH OUT

A theme so generic it can't lose ("believe in yourself"). If the opposite of your theme isn't something a reasonable person might believe, there is no argument, and a movie is an argument.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

Priya's father, packing up the hardware store the chain put under: "You can't audit your way to a clean conscience, beta. The ledger balances. That's not the same as being right." Priya, reflexively straightening his crooked going-out-of-business sign: "It's not my ledger, Papa. I just check the math."

BEAT 03

TARGET ~10% • PAGES 1-10

Set-Up.

the whole world before the bomb goes off.

The first ten pages introduce the hero, their world, and everything the story will need later: the want, the flaw, the key relationships, the skills that will save them in act three, and what Snyder called the **six things that need fixing**, a handful of concrete lacks and irritations in the hero's life that the finale will repay one by one. Think of the Set-Up as loading the pistols. Nothing planted here is wasted; nothing needed later goes unplanted.

The Set-Up must also make the case that the status quo, left alone, would slowly kill the hero. Snyder called it "stasis = death." Before the Catalyst arrives, the audience should feel that this life, however comfortable, is a dead end. That feeling is what makes the coming disruption welcome instead of merely unfortunate.

ON THE PAGE

- List your six things that need fixing in your notes, and check them again at the Finale - each one is a promised payoff.
- Give the hero a "save the cat" moment, one genuinely likeable or intriguing action that buys the audience's company for two hours.
- Introduce every act-three tool now - the skill, the object, the ally. Nothing is more deflating than a solution the audience never saw loaded.

WATCH OUT

Set-up delivered as biography. We do not need the hero's history; we need their *routine*. Routine is what the Catalyst breaks, and the audience can only feel the break if they've seen the pattern.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

Priya's routine: gym at five, desk by seven, denial letters by nine, lunch alone at her desk. Things needing fixing: the director job dangled and delayed; a sister who stopped calling; a stack of unused vacation days; a hometown she hasn't visited since the store closed. Save the cat: she quietly re-files a widow's late claim under a clause that pays out - because the math supports it, she insists.

BEAT 04

TARGET ~12% • PAGE 12

Catalyst.

the knock on the door. life as scheduled ends here.

On or near page twelve, something happens *to* the hero that makes the old life impossible to continue unexamined: the telegram, the diagnosis, the body, the offer. The Catalyst is a single, concrete, external event, not a decision, not a mood. The hero does not act here; the hero is acted upon. Their response comes next, in the Debate.

Scale it honestly. The Catalyst does not have to be enormous. It has to be **irreversible**. News that can be un-heard, an offer that can be politely declined and forgotten, is not a catalyst; it's an anecdote. Ask whether, after this scene, the hero could plausibly go back to page one's routine and pretend nothing happened. If they could, hit harder.

ON THE PAGE

- Keep it on-screen and dramatized. Catalysts reported second-hand ("I heard you got the case") waste the biggest spark in act one.
- Aim it at the flaw. The best catalysts are precisely the event this particular hero is least equipped to handle.
- Land it by page 12-15 of a feature (the first eighth of any story). Every page later is a page the reader spends waiting.

WATCH OUT

Confusing the Catalyst with the Break Into Two. The Catalyst is the invitation; the Break is the RSVP. If your hero receives the call and instantly commits, you've skipped the Debate and thrown away thirteen pages of delicious reluctance.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

Page twelve: the Marsh Creek flood file lands on Priya's desk - two hundred claims, one town, and a promotion attached if she closes them clean. Stapled inside claim #37: a maintenance memo, three years old, flagging the company-owned levee as "deferred." The signature approving the deferral is her mentor's. The routing initials are hers.

BEAT 05

TARGET ~20% • PAGES 12-25

Debate.

should I? the last gasp of the old self.

For a dozen pages the hero resists. The Debate is a question. Should I go? Can I do this? What will it cost? It plays out through hesitation, preparation, failed alternatives, and bad advice, and it exists because a choice with no visible deliberation carries no weight. The audience measures the size of the adventure by the size of the resistance to it.

The Debate is also where stakes get priced. Let the hero try the *easy* ways out first - delegate the problem, ignore it, pay it off - and let each fail believably. By the time they commit, every cheaper exit should be spent, so the Break Into Two feels less like a whim and more like the only door left.

ON THE PAGE

- Make the debate a real argument with a case on both sides - voiced by other characters where possible, not just interior monologue.
- Show the cost of going AND the cost of staying. The trap should tighten from both directions.
- Use the section to sneak in exposition under tension: research, packing, and reconnaissance scenes carry information painlessly.

WATCH OUT

A debate the audience can't lose. If the hero has no genuinely good reason to refuse, the section reads as vamping. Give the refusal a case a smart friend would endorse.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

Priya tries every clean exit. She requests reassignment (denied; "you're our closer"), quietly re-checks the memo hoping it's wrong (it's worse), and tests the ethics hotline with a hypothetical (the hotline logs her employee ID). Her mentor takes her to lunch and, warmly, prices the silence: regional director, corner office, her name on the letterhead. All she has to do is what she's best at. Deny by the book.

BEAT 06

TARGET ~25% • PAGE 25

Break Into Two.

the hero chooses. the old world closes behind them.

At the quarter mark, the hero makes a proactive choice and steps into the "antithesis world" of act two, a place that operates by different rules, where the old competencies stop working. The essential word is **chooses**. Catalysts happen to heroes; the Break Into Two must be something the hero does, eyes open, knowing a price exists. Passive heroes dragged across this line drag the whole second act behind them.

Mark the border physically if you can. New location, new job, new name, new uniform. Film is spatial, and audiences feel act breaks in geography. Even in a single-location story, change the hero's standing within the world so completely that page 26 could not be mistaken for page 24.

ON THE PAGE

- Let the choice cost something immediately - a bridge burned in the scene itself, not on credit.
- State the new goal in concrete terms the audience can track for sixty pages: win the tournament, prove the fraud, survive the week.
- Snyder's rule of thumb: the hero should enter act two *wanting* the fix that won't work - pursuing the want, not the need.

WATCH OUT

Sliding into act two. If you cannot point to the single frame where the hero commits, neither can the audience, and the middle of your story will start without them noticing it started.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

Priya signs the Marsh Creek assignment. Then, alone in the records room, she photographs the levee memo with her personal phone. One act as the company's closer, one act as its quiet enemy. She books a site visit to Marsh Creek "for due diligence," a town she could have assessed from her desk. The elevator doors close on the corporate floor like a vault.

BEAT 07

TARGET ~30% • PAGE 30

B Story.

a new relationship arrives, carrying the theme.

Shortly after the act break, a second story begins, usually a relationship native to the new world: the love interest, the mentor, the unlikely ally, the found family. The B Story is not a subplot for variety's sake; it is the **theme's delivery vehicle**. While the A story argues with the hero's want, the B story character speaks for the need, modeling or teaching the lesson from Theme Stated. Act three will work only if these two stories collide and combine.

The B story also functions as the pressure valve. Its scenes run warmer, funnier, and quieter than the A plot, which lets you pace the audience's heart rate. When the A story tightens, a B story scene is where the hero (and viewer) breathes, and where the theme sneaks in while everyone's guard is down.

ON THE PAGE

- Cast the B character as a citizen of the antithesis world - someone the page-one hero would never have met, or never have heard.
- Give the B story its own tiny beat sheet: a meet, a deepening, a rupture near All Is Lost, a repair that fuels act three.
- Let the B character challenge the hero's flaw directly - they can say things the plot can't.

WATCH OUT

A B story that never touches the A story. If you could delete the relationship without changing the finale, it isn't a B story; it's a hostage. The Break Into Three should be impossible without something the B story gave the hero.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

In Marsh Creek, Priya meets Dee, the diner owner whose flooded claim she personally denied in the opening image's stack, and who doesn't know it. Dee runs a claims-help table out of the diner, walking neighbors through appeals with a highlighter and endless coffee. She works outside the ledger entirely. She is the theme with an apron on.

BEAT 08

TARGET ~40% • PAGES 30-55

Fun and Games.

the promise of the premise. what the trailer sells.

For twenty-five glorious pages, the story delivers exactly what its concept advertised. The bodyguard guards the pop star; the fish flops out of water; the con is run; the haunted house haunts. Snyder called this the "promise of the premise," and it is the section audiences quote, trailers mine, and posters illustrate. Structure relaxes its grip slightly here - these are set pieces, and their first duty is to be *wonderful*.

But wonderful is not weightless. The Fun and Games should run on the friction between the hero's old methods and the new world's rules - each set piece a test the hero half-passes, succeeding through the want while the unlearned need quietly racks up interest. String your set pieces on an escalating line, each riskier, deeper in, harder to walk back than the last, so the section climbs toward the Midpoint instead of circling.

ON THE PAGE

- Write the poster scenes. List the five moments that made you want to write this premise; at least three belong in this section.
- Alternate wins and losses, but tilt the run toward apparent success if your Midpoint is a false victory (or failure, if it's a false defeat).
- Keep the antagonist off-stage or underestimated here. Their full weight is act two B's job.

WATCH OUT

Premise drift. If your heist movie spends pages 30-55 on a custody dispute, the audience feels cheated of the movie they bought. Whatever the concept promised, this is where it pays or defaults.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

The double life in full swing: by day Priya processes Marsh Creek claims with famous precision; by night she rebuilds the levee paper trail from Dee's corner booth. Set pieces: talking her way into the records annex with pure actuarial jargon; a tense, hilarious audit she conducts on her own company under the guise of "quality control"; teaching Dee's claims table to weaponize clause 14-C. She has never been better at her job. It is, technically, betrayal.

Midpoint.

false victory or false defeat. the clock starts.

At dead center, the story turns on a hinge. Either the hero seems to get everything they wanted (**false victory**) or seems to lose everything (**false defeat**). False, in both cases, because the win or loss belongs to the want, not the need - the hero is celebrating (or mourning) the wrong thing. From this scene on, the movie stops being fun and starts being serious. Stakes go public, time limits appear, and what Snyder called "the clock" starts ticking toward act three.

The Midpoint and All Is Lost are inverted twins. A false victory at 50% sets up a real collapse at 75%; a false defeat sets up an apparent recovery that collapses harder. Decide the pair together. And use the Midpoint to **raise stakes categorically**: what was private becomes public, what was a game becomes mortal, what was reversible no longer is.

ON THE PAGE

- Stage it big. Midpoints live at parties, premieres, funerals, launches - public arenas where victory or defeat has witnesses.
- Cross the A and B stories here for the first time; the relationship should complicate the goal, or the goal the relationship.
- Start a literal clock where you can: a date set, an ultimatum issued, a deadline announced. Act two B runs on it.

WATCH OUT

A midpoint that is merely "a big scene." The test is direction-change. Pressure must flow differently afterward. If pages 56-75 could precede page 55 unchanged, the hinge didn't turn.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

False victory, in a ballroom: at the company gala, the CEO announces Marsh Creek closed "clean" ahead of schedule and names Priya regional director - the corner office, the letterhead, the want, gift-wrapped. Mid-ovation, her phone buzzes. Dee, thrilled, has forwarded Priya's anonymous levee dossier to a reporter... who is at the gala, and has started asking who compiled it. The clock starts: the story runs Friday.

BEAT 10

TARGET ~60% • PAGES 55-75

Bad Guys Close In.

pressure from outside. rot from inside.

After the Midpoint's false peak, the vise tightens on two fronts at once. Externally, the antagonist, alerted, humiliated, or simply patient, regroups and presses their advantage with real force for the first time. Internally, the hero's team frays: doubt, jealousy, secrets surfacing, the flaw reasserting itself under stress. Snyder's insight is that the internal front matters more; villains close in fastest through cracks the hero made.

Structure the section as an accelerating drumbeat, not a plateau. Each scene should remove an asset the hero relied on - an ally, an alibi, a resource, an illusion - so that All Is Lost arrives not as an ambush but as arithmetic: with this much stripped away, collapse becomes simply true. This is also where the false victory decays on screen; the prize from the Midpoint should curdle scene by scene.

ON THE PAGE

- Inventory the hero's assets at page 55 and schedule their removal. The section is a controlled demolition.
- Let the flaw do real damage here - the hero's own worst habit should cost them at least one ally.
- Give the antagonist their best scene: competence, reach, and a fair point. Fear grows where respect does.

WATCH OUT

External pressure only. Twenty pages of the villain winning gets numbing; it's the hero's unraveling - lies compounding, friends alienated - that makes the pressure personal and the All Is Lost feel deserved.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

The company's counsel opens a "routine" leak inquiry that is anything but; Priya's badge access quietly shrinks, floor by floor. Her mentor, who knows her fingerprints when he sees them, starts covering for her in ways that are also warnings. And Dee learns, from the reporter's fact-check, exactly whose signature sits on her own denial letter. The corner booth goes cold. Priya lies to everyone now, fluently, and hates how good she is at it.

BEAT 11

TARGET ~75% • PAGE 75

All Is Lost.

the plan fails. something dies here.

At the three-quarter mark, the bottom drops out. The hero's plan, the whole act-two strategy built on the want, fails completely and publicly. Snyder's signature requirement: the moment carries a **whiff of death**. Something dies on or around this page (a mentor, a relationship, a business, a reputation, an identity) because the story is about rebirth, and rebirth requires a funeral. Even comedies obey this; the death is simply symbolic.

The craft is opposition to the Midpoint. False victory there means true defeat here, and the two scenes should rhyme visually: the same ballroom empty, the same trophy in a dumpster. Crucially, the defeat should be traceable to the hero's flaw, not to bad luck. Luck teaches nothing; the Dark Night that follows needs a lesson with the hero's own name on it.

ON THE PAGE

- Take everything: the want, the B story relationship, and the fallback position. Heroes with fallbacks don't transform.
- Make the whiff of death concrete - a literal loss, a funeral image, an ending of something that can be photographed.
- Let the flaw pull the trigger. The audience should see that the page-one hero was always going to arrive here.

WATCH OUT

Pulling the punch. A 70% loss the hero can shrug off produces a 70% finale. If you find yourself protecting your hero here, you are protecting the draft from its own best scene.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

Friday. The story runs - gutted. Legal got there first: the levee memo is "unverifiable," the source "a disgruntled employee under internal investigation." Priya is escorted from the building with her plants in a box, the directorship rescinded, her name pre-smeared. Dee's diner, its appeal money frozen pending the inquiry Priya caused, shutters. On the drive home, Priya passes her father's old store. The going-out-of-business sign she once straightened still hangs there, faded. Whiff of death, in vinyl letters.

BEAT 12

TARGET ~80% • PAGES 75-85

Dark Night of the Soul.

sitting in the wreckage until the lesson lands.

For a handful of pages, the hero simply grieves. No plans, no montages, no rescue. The story slows to a crawl on purpose, and the audience sits with the hero at the bottom. This beat is the reason All Is Lost had to be total. With the want dead and the armor useless, the hero finally has nothing left to do but hear the theme. The sentence from page five returns, remembered, overheard, re-read, and this time it lands.

Resist the modern urge to compress this into a single sad look. The duration is the point. Transformation must be witnessed to be believed, and the audience's patience here is what purchases their euphoria at the Break Into Three. The tone can be quiet, bitter, even funny. But the hero must touch bottom, and the bottom must hold their full weight.

ON THE PAGE

- Strip the hero's environment to match - empty apartment, parked car, childhood bedroom. Setting is interiority you can film.
- Bring the theme back through an object or echo, not a lecture: the B story's gift, the parent's phrase, the page-five line replayed.
- End the beat on the hero's gaze landing on the thing that will spark the answer - the seed of the Break Into Three, planted in the dark.

WATCH OUT

Skipping the grief. A hero who bounces from ruin to inspiration in half a page reads as unbreakable, and unbreakable heroes are unwatchable - nothing was ever at stake.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

Priya spends three days in her childhood bedroom above the closed hardware store. Her father doesn't ask. On day three she finds his old store ledger - and in the margins, decades of entries the math never justified: credit extended to flooded families, debts quietly zeroed. The ledger never balanced. He kept it anyway. "You can't audit your way to a clean conscience." She finally stops trying to.

BEAT 13

TARGET ~85% • PAGE 85

Break Into Three.

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

Inspiration strikes - but not from nowhere. The classic Break Into Three is a **synthesis**: something from the B story (the relationship, the lesson, the gift) combines with something from the A story (the goal, the skill, the unfinished business) to reveal a plan the hero could never have seen before the transformation. The thesis world of act one and the antithesis world of act two resolve into a third way. That is why Snyder called act three the synthesis world.

The moment should be fast, bright, and earned - a key turning in a lock the whole movie cut the teeth for. The audience ideally assembles the answer a half-second before the hero does; that tiny gap of anticipation is one of cinema's purest pleasures. And the new plan must run on the need: whatever the hero attempts now, it should be something the page-one version - flaw intact - would never have dared or even understood.

ON THE PAGE

- Audit the ingredients: the solution should use only planted material - Set-Up tools, B story gifts, Fun and Games lessons. No new gadgets at 85%.
- Reunite or invoke the B story character here; their thread is the fuse that lights the finale.
- Keep it a single scene. The realization is a spark, not a seminar; the Finale is where it burns.

WATCH OUT

The coincidence rescue. If the way forward arrives via lottery ticket, lawyer's phone call, or villainous blunder, the hero's transformation was decorative. The plan must exist *because* the hero changed.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

The synthesis, at the kitchen table: alone, her word is worthless - legal saw to that. But claims aren't words. Dee's appeal table taught two hundred families to file; Priya's decade of denials taught her every clause that forces a payout and discovery. She can't leak the memo. She can make two hundred policyholders lawfully subpoena it - simultaneously. The closer will run the biggest claims-approval drive in company history, from a diner.

BEAT 14

TARGET ~95% • PAGES 85-110

Finale.

the new self, executed under maximum fire.

The hero runs the new plan against the antagonist at full strength, and both stories, external and internal, resolve in the same sequence of action. Later Save the Cat practice breaks the finale into five movements worth borrowing: **gather the team** (allies and tools assembled), **execute the plan** (it goes well...), **the high tower surprise** (...until the antagonist reveals a final twist the plan didn't cover), **dig deep down** (the hero, plan gone, must act from pure transformed character), and **the execution of the new plan** (improvised from the need, it wins).

The high tower surprise is the load-bearing move. A finale that goes exactly to plan proves the plan, not the person. Take the plan away at the worst moment and make the hero choose, in real time, as their new self. That choice is the climax of the entire film, and it should cost them the last thing they were still holding back.

ON THE PAGE

- Resolve want versus need explicitly: classically the hero wins the need and gets the want back transformed - or gladly lets it go.
- Pay the six things that need fixing, one by one. Audiences keep receipts from page ten.
- Give the antagonist a real chance to win. Finales are only as big as the villain's best punch.

WATCH OUT

A finale the hero watches. If the climactic action could be performed by any competent character - the cop, the lawyer, the friend - the movie ends without its protagonist. The transformed hero must personally throw the last punch.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

Team gathered at the diner; two hundred appeals filed at 9:00 a.m. sharp. It works - until the high tower surprise: the company invokes an emergency clause freezing all Marsh Creek claims, and her mentor arrives with a final offer: reinstatement, the memo buried, everyone (except the town) made whole. Dig deep: Priya declines - on the record, under oath, at the public hearing her filings triggered, testifying to her own signature. The whistle finally blown with her name on it. The freeze collapses; discovery opens; the levee memo walks into the light through the front door.

BEAT 15

TARGET 100% • PAGE 110

Final Image.

the "after" photo. proof the promise was kept.

The last thing the audience sees mirrors the first. Same world, same hero, transformed. The Final Image is the Opening Image's answer, and together they are the movie's thesis in two photographs. It needs no dialogue and little time - the entire film has been the caption. If the pair doesn't rhyme, one of them is wrong, and it is usually this one that got neglected.

Choose transformation over triumph. The image is not "the hero celebrating"; it is the hero *living differently* - doing, in the closing frame, the thing the opening frame proved they could not do. Understatement wins here. After a finale at full volume, a quiet image lands loudest, and gives the audience the last beat of the argument to complete themselves.

ON THE PAGE

- Reuse the opening's grammar (location, composition, action) with one decisive element changed. The echo does the work.
- Show the flaw's opposite as effortless habit, not effortful victory. Change that looks easy reads as permanent.
- End within moments of the climax's resolution. Every page after the final image is paid for in applause.

WATCH OUT

The epilogue pile-up: five endings, each wrapping a subplot the finale already wrapped. Pick the one image that proves the theme and cut to black while the audience still wants one more second.

ACTS OF GOD • PRIYA

A living room, water-stained but dry, family photos back on the wall. Priya - now the claims-help clinic's first employee, in Dee's diner apron - sits at the kitchen table walking the family through their approved settlement. She looks up. The final image is just that: Priya, looking up.

Adapting the frame.

built for features. useful nearly everywhere.

NOVELS

Swap page numbers for word-count percentages and the sheet converts directly. In a 90,000-word novel the Catalyst lands near 11,000 words, the Midpoint near 45,000, All Is Lost near 67,000. The multi-scene beats (Set-Up, Fun and Games, Bad Guys Close In) expand most gracefully; prose earns its longer runway with interiority film can't reach. The one adjustment is that novels tolerate, and often need, a longer Dark Night of the Soul, because grief is prose's home turf.

TELEVISION

A pilot can run the full fifteen in miniature, but the sheet's real TV use is per-season: Catalyst in the premiere, Midpoint at the mid-season turn, All Is Lost in the penultimate episode. Individual episodes usually want lighter scaffolding (see our A/B/C story and three-act guides); reserve the full BS2 for arcs.

TO NE AND GENRE

The beats are tone-agnostic; the same skeleton carries horror and romcom because the beats specify pressure, not content. What changes by genre is amplitude: comedy plays All Is Lost as humiliation, horror as body count, drama as moral collapse. Snyder's companion idea, that every movie belongs to one of ten story types with their own required elements, is beyond this guide, but worth exploring in his book if you want genre-level scaffolding on top of the beat-level kind.

WHEN TO LOOSEN IT

The sheet describes the mainstream feature superbly and literary, episodic, and slice-of-life shapes poorly. If your story is deliberately quiet, treat the beats as diagnostic questions rather than quotas: Is there a moment the fun stops? Does the bottom drop out somewhere? Does the ending answer the opening? Structure serves the story; the paperwork never outranks the passenger.

Seven ways screenplays go wrong.

read this list again at the end of every draft.

- **1. The late catalyst.** Thirty pages of set-up before anything disrupts. Fix: catalyst by 12%. Move backstory into the Debate and act two, where tension makes it digestible.
- **2. The passive break.** The hero is pushed, shipped, or tricked into act two. Fix: engineer a real choice with a visible price; burn an exit on-screen.
- **3. Premise default.** Fun and Games that abandons what the poster promised. Fix: list the five scenes the concept owes the audience; schedule at least three between 30% and 55%.
- **4. The flat midpoint.** A big scene that changes nothing's direction. Fix: make it a false victory or false defeat, cross A and B stories, and start a clock.
- **5. 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 the funeral, literal or symbolic.
- **6. The unearned answer.** Break Into Three via coincidence, confession, or cavalry. Fix: audit the plan's ingredients; every component must be planted material, unlocked by the lesson.
- **7. The spectator finale.** Lawyers, mentors, or physics resolve the climax while the hero watches. Fix: restructure until the transformed hero personally performs the decisive act.

THE MASTER DIAGNOSTIC

For any scene that feels dead, ask which beat it is serving and whether it moves the hero closer to the want or the need. A scene serving neither is cargo. In a 110-page vehicle, cargo is the first thing thrown overboard.

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 SET-UP 1-10%

04 CATALYST 12%

05 DEBATE 12-25%

06 BREAK INTO TWO 25%

07 B STORY 30%

08 FUN AND GAMES

30-55%

09 MIDPOINT 50%

10 BAD GUYS CLOSE IN 55-75%

11 ALL IS LOST 75%

12 DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL 75-85%

13 BREAK INTO THREE 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 screenplay's version of it right on the page, and walk away with a complete outline in an afternoon.

onemoredraft.com/guides/save-the-cat

One More Draft is a complete workshop for writers, with industry-standard screenplay formatting with professional PDF export, a distraction-free manuscript editor, story planning tools for characters, beats, and worlds, 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

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

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



ONE MORE DRAFT

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