



DEVELOPMENT

1. DEVELOP YOUR FILM IDEA

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Premise

Good films have a clear message within them that can be described in one sentence. This is called a premise. If you don't have a premise, you don't have a film. Having a premise will keep you focused and motivated throughout the production process and ensure that what you want to say is communicated to the audience.

A premise could be a moral, a warning or a piece of advice such as:

- Look before you leap
- Be careful what you wish for
- True friends will always stand by you
- Love can be found in unexpected places
- The only way to stop bullying is to tell somebody
- If you want to succeed, dedication's what you need.

Think about your theme and then mind map what you know about it. What do you want to tell the audience about your theme? This will help you to decide on a premise.

The examples on the following pages identify what we think are the themes and premises used in some well-known films. Do you agree?

E.T. THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL (U)



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THEME



Love



Friendship

PREMISE

*If you love someone,
let them go.*

Elliot finds an abandoned alien in his garden. They become friends and he tries to help E.T. live undetected on earth as part of his family. When E.T. becomes ill and homesick however, Elliot fights to help him go home.

TOY STORY (PG)



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THEME



Identity

PREMISE

*The best way to win is
to work together.*

Woody is a cowboy doll who belongs to a young boy named Andy. His position as Andy's favourite toy is jeopardised however when his parents buy him a Buzz Lightyear action figure. Woody becomes jealous of Buzz but when the family move house, Woody and Buzz have to work together to find Andy.

BATMAN BEGINS (12)



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THEME



Triumph over adversity

PREMISE

*Your fears can become
your strengths.*

The desire to avenge his parents' murders sends Bruce Wayne on a quest to learn how to improve his fighting skills. Bruce discovers that he has to defeat his phobia of bats in order to achieve power and strength. He returns to his home city of Gotham as his new alter ego Batman.

JAWS (12A)



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THEME



Courage

PREMISE

*Be brave and do the
right thing.*

When a great white shark starts killing swimmers off the island of Amity, police chief Brody wants to close the beaches. However, the town's mayor, wanting to preserve the town's tourism industry, overrules him. Brody realises he'll have to hire a boat, and a couple of helpers, and go and kill the shark himself.

Character development

Once you have your premise, you next have to create characters who will prove it. Traditionally, the two main characters in a film are the protagonist and the antagonist.

Protagonist (hero)

A protagonist is your main character and it is their story you are telling in your film. A protagonist needs to be likeable so that the audience will engage with them and want them to succeed. You can have an evil protagonist, but they will need to have likeable qualities or weaknesses that people can sympathise with.

By the end of the film, your protagonist should have learned something new about themselves or the world – the thing they learn is your premise. In order for them to prove the premise, they need to go on a journey during your film that causes them to change.

Antagonist (villain)

The antagonist's role is to challenge and cause trouble for your protagonist. The antagonist often holds an opposing point of view to the protagonist, which may force them to question their beliefs. The antagonist may force the protagonist into a difficult situation, or present them with many problems and challenges to overcome. It's through experiencing and overcoming difficulty that your protagonist will learn something new and prove your premise.

Other character types you may be familiar with from films are:

- **Mentors** advise and guide your hero, eg Yoda from *Star Wars*
- **Allies** provide help and support to the hero, eg Mr Potato Head, Slinky Dog, Rex, Hamm etc. from *Toy Story*
- **Tricksters/clowns** bring humour to a film, but also convey a mischievous point of view, eg Donkey from *Shrek*
- **Shape shifters** are characters that change. They can appear to be one way but are actually turn out to be the opposite, eg Harvey Dent (Two-Face) from *The Dark Knight*

NB

When developing your characters, avoid stereotypes that make assumptions or that might offend your audience.

Activity: Exploring character types

Think about your favourite films, plays and books. Can you identify which characters are the protagonists and which the antagonists? Consider what character types your favourite characters are. Making notes about this might help you to begin to decide the identity of the characters that will appear in your film.

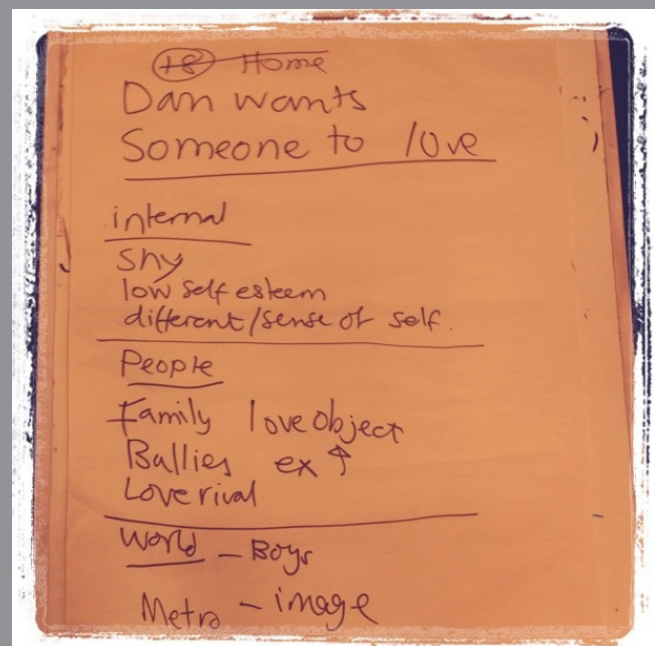
Genre

Who your protagonist and antagonists are and where they live can all be decided by the **genre** of your film. Each genre has a set of conventions associated with it that dictates character roles, settings, costumes and props etc. For example, if you are going to make a horror film, your protagonist might be a curious teenager, your antagonist a mad inventor, your setting a haunted house, your theme could be good versus evil, your premise: look before you leap.

You can also mix conventions a little. You could make a science fiction film with a lonely teenager as your protagonist, alien abductors as his antagonists and an outer-space setting. The theme, however, could be love and your premise: love is found in the most unexpected places.

Genre

Refers to a grouping of films or television programmes in terms of their theme and style, eg horror films, sci-fi, soap opera.



NB

Many genres overlap or have sub-genres. For example, the drama genre, which portrays realistic characters, settings and scenarios, has sub-genres such as weepies, biopics and courtroom dramas. Comedies are often categorised by sub-genres such as slapstick, rom-com or spoof.

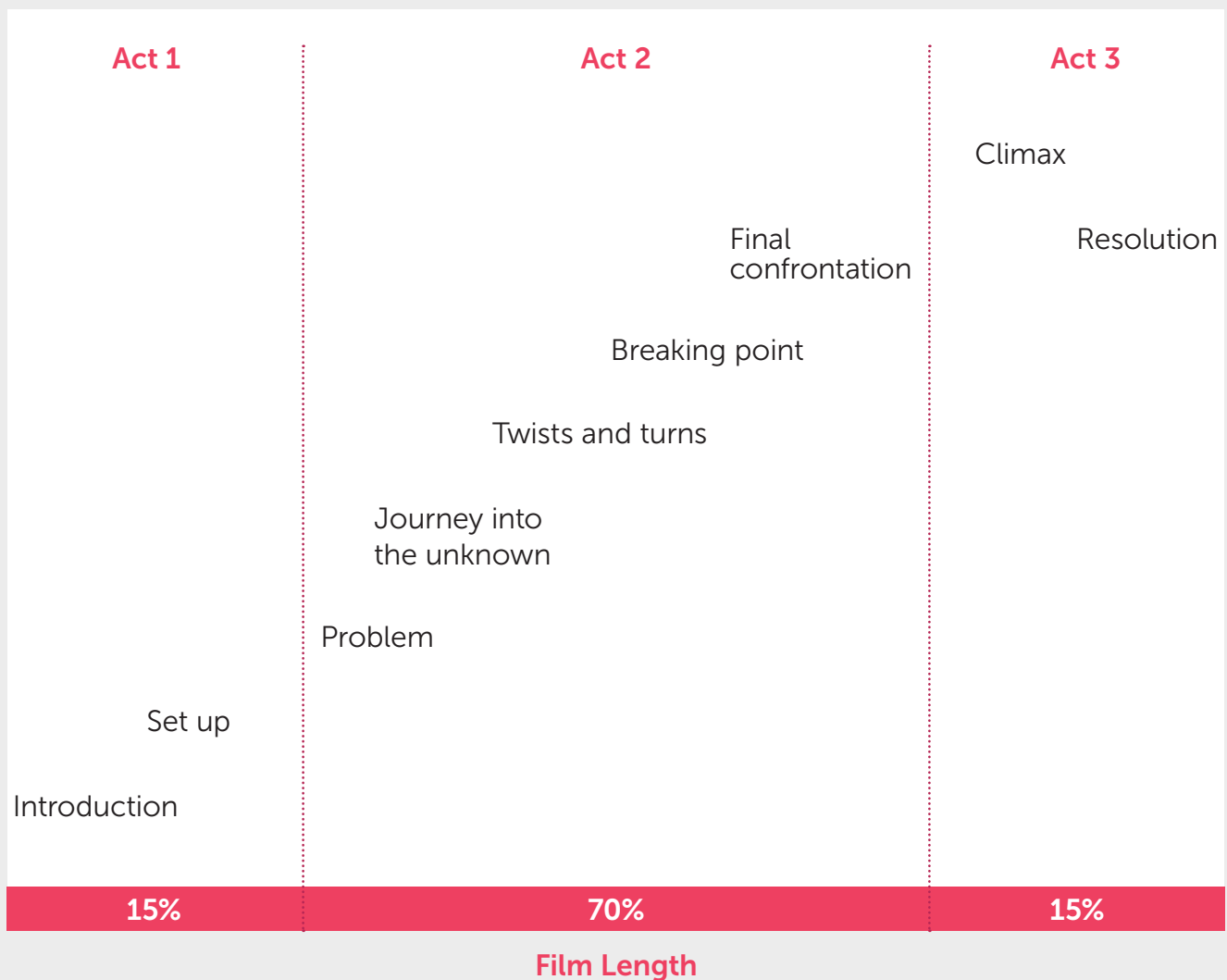
Activity: What do you know about genre?

Below is a chart that lists some film genres and some of the conventions we think are associated with them. At the bottom of the chart there are two empty rows. Fill in the conventions for the **Western** genre and add another genre of your choice.

Genres	Scenarios	Settings	Characters	Style
Action/ adventure	Battles, escapes, natural disasters	Deserts, jungles, exotic locations	Spies, superheroes	High impact, 3D, high definition (HD), loud
Science fiction	Alien abductions, robots vs humans, improbable quests	Other planets, fantasy worlds	Mad scientists, monsters, aliens	Out of this world, complicated set design, bizarre costumes and make-up
Romance	Relationships, usually hard won, that end in death or marriage	Familiar or historical settings	Princesses, peasants, knights or even just 'ordinary people'	Soft focus, warm colours, flouncy, over the top, period costumes
Horror	Play on audiences' worst fears, eg spiders, darkness, ghosts	Cemeteries, haunted houses	Zombies, monsters vs 'ordinary people'	Dark, shadowy, sinister, use of sound effects and music to build tension
Western				

Create your story

Now you are ready to write the story for your film. It will need a beginning, middle and end and should be structured like a play with three acts. Setting out a clear structure will give you a solid foundation to build your film around.



Act 1 Beginning: Introduction, Set up

Introduce the world of your protagonist. Who is your main character? How old are they? What do they do/like? Where do they live? What is their day-to-day life like?

Act 2 Middle: Problem, Journey into the unknown, Twists and turns, Breaking point, Final confrontation

A problem or issue arises for your protagonist which forces them to go on a journey to overcome it. This problem could be caused by your antagonist, or your main character could meet them during their journey. The antagonist may be part of the twists, turns and challenges the protagonist has to negotiate. Eventually they will be pushed to breaking point and will be involved in a confrontation. The confrontation will cause him or her to learn something new and change.

Act 3 End: Climax, Resolution

Here the protagonist has to apply his or her new knowledge (and prove the premise) by using it to resolve the problem(s) he or she is facing. The story can now conclude with a happy ending. If you want your story to end in tragedy, then your protagonist's failure will prove the premise.

The Into Film short How to Structure a Film at <http://bit.ly/HowToStructureAFilm> summarises this process.

A simpler basic story structure, **Planning your story**, can be found on page 13.

Top Tip

If you already have a storyline in mind you could use one of these story structuring resources to help identify the stages in your story. If you have any stages missing you can do some rewriting to make sure they are included.

And finally, your thought process might not follow the order stated above. If you cover all of the elements (Theme, Premise, Character, Genre, Story) you should create an entertaining film. For example, you might begin to realise that you want to make an alien abduction film, and so you develop your theme, premise, characters and story from this sub-genre starting point.



Planning your story

1) Beginning
(There was once a...)

Who is your main character (protagonist)? What does the audience need to know about them? (Age? What they do? What they like?) Where is the story set?

Handwriting practice lines for the beginning section.

2) The Build Up:
(One day...)

What happens to the protagonist, which sends them on a journey or mission or adventure? (They could receive a message or an invitation or somebody could ask for their help...) What is their goal?

Handwriting practice lines for the build up section.

3) The Problem:
(Suddenly...)

What big problem occurs that gets in the way of your protagonist achieving his/her goal? Who or what causes this problem (antagonist)?

Handwriting practice lines for the problem section.

4) The Resolution:
(The hero must...)

What must the hero do to solve the problem? (This will probably be something new or something they have never done before.)

Handwriting practice lines for the resolution section.

5) The Ending:
(Finally...)

How does the story end? What happens now that the problem has been solved? How has your protagonist changed? What has he/she learned?

Handwriting practice lines for the ending section.

