

Week 1 Assignment
Due 10/11/10

1) Read the first chapter of Kristin Thompson's book "Storytelling in the new Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique." This is a 50-page chapter and most of it isn't directly applicable to this course.

If you are interested in how Thompson believes the structure of major movies came to be:
- read from the beginning.

If you only have the time to do this assignment,
- read from page 27, "An Inductive Approach to Structure"

After you feel you get the idea,
- from page 36-42 "A Matter of Timing".

If you don't even have time for that much reading, you can read my notes below.

2) Watch a television show, short film or read a short story. Diagram the story along with an estimate of the relative timings (e.g., first 1/4, half-way) of each turning point. What was the initial hook? Where were the complicating actions?

A goal in this course is to answer the question: Can we bring this sort of structure to explaining our research?

My (very rough) notes:

[pro = protagonist]

A change in the protagonist's goals shifts the direction of the narrative.

setup

initial situation is thoroughly established. Main characters are introduced, and pro conceives of one or more goals during this section. In some cases, the setup sticks to introducing the circumstances that will later lead to the formulation of goals.

complicating action

The complicating action takes the plot in a new direction. The new direction may simply involve the hero pursuing a goal conceived during the setup but having to change tactics dramatically. Also, complicating action serves as a counter-setup, creating a whole new situation with which the protagonist must cope.

development

By now, an extensive set of premises, goals, and obstacles has been introduced. This is where the pro's struggle toward his or her goals typically occurs, often involving many incidents that create action, suspense, and delay. The development section usually ends at

the point where all the premises regarding the goals and the lines of action have been introduced. Here the climax portion begins and the action shifts into a straightforward progress toward the final resolution, typically building steadily toward a concentrated sequence of high action. Will the protagonist's goals be achieved or not?

climax

(optional) short epilogue

A short (and also rough) example:

The Big Lebowski

setup:

voice over explaining the pro (The Dude, el Duderino, His Dudeness, or Duder if you're not into the brevity thing) as a hero while we see him in his bathrobe in a grocery store purchasing an ingredient for his cocktail.

first complicating action:

thugs confuse The Dude with someone of the same given name (Lebowski), and they piss on his rug.

development:

The Dude's friend suggest that he get recompensed from "The Big Lebowski". The Dude attempts to get recompense from "The Big Lebowski", and meets his young, seductive wife. He also fails at getting recompensed.

second complicating action:

The young, seductive wife is kidnapped!

development:

The Dude has been hired to find her

...etc

climax:

The Truth about wife's kidnapping is revealed, Dude's romantic relationship concludes, Dude and friends confront Big Lebowski and "kidnappers", friend dies.

epilogue:

Scattering remains of friend , voice over (wraps er all up).