

Story. Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting by Robert McKee

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"Story is a metaphor for life."

Background information:

McKee's "Story" is the most extensive work on the subject of dramaturgy for scripts. The review of this work must also be longer than the others. The excellence of this work is based on the range of elements of dramaturgical texts McKee examines and the depth of his analysis. The author uses the principles of Aristotle but also questions him. McKee also uses the Field paradigm, but in a modified form. In contrast to Field, McKee names the structural principles but also their deviations. This allows him to look at the complexity of story creation better than his colleagues.

Unlike Field, McKee understands scriptwriting not as the execution of an abstractly formulated idea. The actual form of the script emerges for McKee as the result of an overall creative process. This process consists partly of analysis, then also of concrete applications of the results and a creative process, which, however, has so many irrational and emotional aspects that it cannot be subject to any regularity. In order to give a work emotional depth and truthfulness, McKee borrows methods from "Method-Acting"

In addition, McKee broke his vision of a "good story" vividly by using many examples from recent film history.

McKee's approach is more extensive, but also more complex than that of his colleagues. He conveys to the learner that writing scripts has a creative dimension that cannot be expressed in formulas, but at the same time he is not afraid to define terms and even go further than his colleagues.

Structure of the drama

A story after McKee describes a great event. Between the beginning and the end of the story there is a significant change in the protagonist's situation.

The structure of a drama is determined by the selection of events from the life story or entire life circle of the central characters. These events are brought into order and if so, feelings and insights are provoked in the audience, which then collectively define an attitude.

Stories are therefore best organized in acts, sequences, scenes and beats.

Supposing a length of approx. 120 minutes:

The first act introduces the world of the action. This act should end with a climax after about 25-30 pages/minutes. Until then, the audience must have a feeling of dynamism towards the climax.

The second act takes about 70 pages/minutes. It connects lines of action and functions in them separately as an act, sometimes also as first or third act, which can result in different narrative speeds.

The climaxes of individual storylines are arranged in relation to one another so that the dynamics from the first act are retained.

The last/third act is reserved to define the central change in the situation of protagonist. The climax is the realization of the immutability of this change.

The last act should last about 20 minutes and is therefore relatively short.

According to McKee, three acts are the minimum requirement for a complete story, so it is not a fragment. At four acts, each act is approximately 30 to 40 minutes long, The middle of the second act is here the moment of significant change.

Since an act is defined by the fact that it ends with a turn of events, and a story can only have a limited number of really significant turns, the effect of the respective turning point decreases with the number of acts.

There are also five-act stories in which a turn should take place after 15 to 20 minutes / pages

The three-act model has become the standard primarily because of its ease of use in analysis. A story in three acts usually contains four memorable scenes:

The inciting moment, which introduces the main plot (central plot), as well as the highlights of the first, second and finally the extremes (climax) of the third act.

Act I Act II Act III

Setting inciting incident

Central plot Climax

30 30-100 100-120

This sketch is the foundation for McKee
a story, but not a formula for creating

Stories.

The introduction to the story defines the four

Dimensions of the framework for action:

epoch

Duration

place

Content of conflict

The triggering moment is the first big event. An incident that is either triggered by the protagonist himself or happens to him, and which throws his life out of balance. The

The triggering moment for the central plot should be as early as

possible within the first 25 minutes

of the first act. The viewer should through other elements of the

Be prepared for the triggering moment within the framework of the action.

be. The triggering moment should contain all the elements that make the climax possible or inevitable in the last act. He also defines action dynamics, action color, and action movement in the following second act. The protagonist is confronted with all three aspects of what lies ahead. His first reaction to this is the conflict that defines the end of the first act.

This conflict is meant to contain the essence of the following story. Tension is generated here, because the audience should now be able to guess what is coming.

The generated conflict should increase steadily during the second act. To this end, it will often take place on several levels of action at the same time. While the protagonist approaches the central conflict, other characters should experience a variation of the same quality of conflict

Every scene must contain an event that is decisive for the course of the story. Events are given importance by determining their "emotional value" for the character in question. This feeling value is defined by what the result of a conflict would be for the respective character.

"A story event creates meaningful change in the life situation of a character that is expressed and experienced in terms of a value and

achieved through conflict. "

Each scene thus represents either the preparation of a conflict or the implementation of the conflict or the consequence of the conflict for the individual participants in a space and time continuum. It must always be about whether a value that is decisive for the character is either questioned is, or is acutely threatened, or the character has to deal with the essential change in this value.

For example, if it is about the value of friendship, this will be shown in a preparatory scene e.g. B discussed as desirable. In the ensuing conflict scene, friendship is either offered and accepted, or refused and rejected. In the next scenes, all characters involved are confronted with the consequences of the previous decision in terms of friendship. A new starting point has been created, the circle begins with new ones.

The character or characters must change their emotional mood significantly in the course of this sequence as a result of the events described. If this is not the case, the viewer has the feeling that a lot is happening, but actually nothing is happening. So the scene is superfluous.

A scene will always be linear in space and time

expand. If it is divided into several parts, the temporal and spatial connection with the preceding and following part must be made clear.

A scene ends when a change in the emotional value has been brought about.