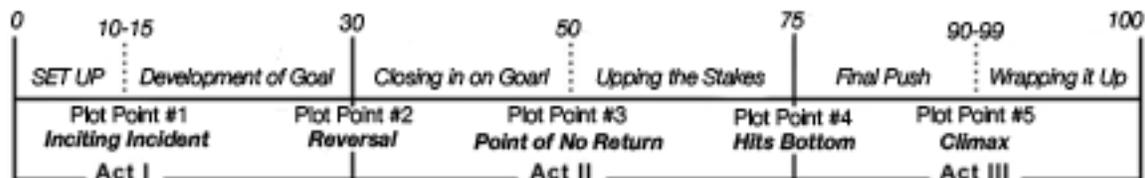# Computational Thinking Concepts in DC 201

Concept: Abstraction

In a properly structured movie, the story consists of six basic stages, which are defined by five key points in the plot. Not only are these points always the same; they always occupy the same positions in the story. So what happens at the 25% point of a 90-minute comedy will be identical to what happens at the same percentage of a three-hour epic. (These percentages apply both to the running time of the film and the pages of a screenplay.)

0	10-15		30		50		75		90-99	100
SET UP	Development of Goal		Closing in on Goal!		Upping the Stakes			Final Push		Wrapping it Up

Plot Point #1 — Inciting Incident
Plot Point #2 — Reversal
Plot Point #3 — Point of No Return
Plot Point #4 — Hits Bottom
Plot Point #5 — Climax

Act I — Act II — Act III

PLOT POINT #1: Opportunity or Inciting Incident
Ten percent of the way into a screenplay, the hero must be presented with an opportunity, or some sort of incident which turns his/her world upside down and creates a new, visible desire, which will start the character on his/her journey.

PLOT POINT #2: Change of Plans or Reversal
Something must happen to the hero one-fourth of the way through the screenplay that will transform the original desire into a specific, visible goal with a clearly defined end point. This is the scene where the story concept is defined, and the hero's outer motivation is revealed.

PLOT POINT #3: The Point of No Return
At the exact midpoint of the screenplay, the hero must fully commit to their goal. Up to this point, he/she had the option of turning back, giving up on the plan, and returning to the life he/she was living at the beginning of the film. But now the hero must cross the point of no return.

PLOT POINT #4: Hits Bottom
Around page 90 of your screenplay, something must happen to the hero that makes it seem to the audience that all is lost. These disastrous events leave the hero with only one option: he/she must make one, last, all-or-nothing, do-or-die effort as he/she enters…

PLOT POINT #5: The Climax
Several things must occur at the climax of the film: the hero must face the biggest obstacle of the entire story; he/she must determine his/her own fate; and the outer motivation must be resolved once and for all.

Learning Goal: Students should demonstrate competency in abstracting the structure for a narrative screenplay by breaking down the three-act structure and five plot points to successful and disappointing motion pictures.

Case 1: The Feature

The structure of the three-act narrative creates the feature-length script's spine, which the student can then flesh out in any way he or she is so inclined to do so. These rules of structure also provide students an opportunity to use abstraction when thinking of major turning points or plot points within the screenplay. Knowing that the inciting incident or *turning point #1* must occur at page 15 to 18 (10% into the script) means a student has a very limited amount of time to set up the three basic components of the script: character, desire and conflict.

Understanding the stages and turning points provides screenwriting students with a powerful tool for developing and writing their feature screenplay. Having these basic sets of rules in place, allows a student greater freedom to explore more personal and creative elements of their screenplay.

Discussion Questions:
1. Is there an inciting incident?
2. Is the story concept defined at the one-quarter mark?
3. Have they fully introduced the hero before presenting him/her with an opportunity around page 10?
4. Is there a turning point at the end of Act I?
5. Does the hero hit "bottom" at the end of Act II?
6. Does she/he suffer a major setback 75% of the way into the script?

Assessment: Comparing Flops and Blockbusters to Reveal Structure

- Students will take the screenplays to three successful motion pictures (100 million dollars or more at the box office) and three box office flops all of the same genres and break them down using the THREE ACT STRUCTURE as well as the FIVE PLOT POINTS.

- Students will then compare the six scripts and plot them out using the structure formula outlined in class. They will then draw some conclusions on the theme, metaphor, premise, moral and hero's journey from their script comparisons.

- Through this breakdown and comparison students will discover which screenplays follow the three-act structure and five plot points and which ones do not. In comparing the different plot points, paying close attention to the *inciting incident*, for comedies and dramas students will use *Abstraction* in determining why some motion pictures are successful (box office hits) while others are not despite being from similar genres.

- This assessment is intended to allow students to show that they have a clear understanding of the stages, turning points and overall structure of narrative cinema.

Case 2: The Short

A short screenplay, 15 to 30 pages in length, adheres to the same narrative structure that a feature-length script does. The difference is the time for character development between plot-points in a feature as compared to a short. A short must contain only that which is essential in telling the story. The three-act structure and five plot points allow students to see how their story will play out even before they have figured out character, theme, setting, etc.

Discussion Questions:
1. How many pages is the first, second and third act in a 30 minute screenplay?
2. What is sacrificed in maintaining structure?
3. What is gained in maintaining structure?
4. How many scenes should one aim for when adhering to narrative structure?
5. How can one help define character when so much of the short revolves around plot-points?

Assessment: Distilling the Narrative

- Students will take the screenplay (production draft) to a successful motion picture (100 million dollars or more at the box office) and condense it down into 30 pages. The 30-page version of the script must still express the same story and plot elements of the feature-length version.

- The characters, especially the protagonist and antagonist, must follow the same character arcs in the short as they do in the feature. Some character, plot elements and storylines might be discarded in order to maintain the overall theme and meaning of the original source material.

- It would be best to start with the structure formula outlined in class and build your 30-page script from there.

- The 30-page script will be evaluated on whether the student maintained the conflict, plot and theme from the original feature-length script. Clear use of plot points, climax, resolution and inciting incident will also be evaluated.

- Below is an example of an evaluation form used in this exercise:

EVALUATION FORM FOR FINAL SCRIPT

Student Name: _____

Screenplay Title: _____

OPENING
Inciting Incident Clear   5   4   3   2   1
Plot Point One Established   5   4   3   2   1

MIDDLE
Stakes (Conflict) Increases   5   4   3   2   1
Plot Point Two Established   5   4   3   2   1

END
Plot Point Three Established   5   4   3   2   1
Climax   5   4   3   2   1
Resolution   5   4   3   2   1

OTHER ASPECTS
Original Theme Conveyed   5   4   3   2   1
Maintained Plot of Original Story   5   4   3   2   1
Proper Length   5   4   3   2   1

TOTAL (out of 50):