

Three-Act Structure for 400-page novel

ACT I

Introduce major characters, setting, tone, but as little backstory as possible

<i>Page</i>	<i>% of story</i>	
1-5	1%	Prologue (if absolutely necessary)
40	10%	Inciting incident should occur before this point
60-80	15-25%	Turning point that twists action into new direction STATE GOAL

ACT II

Escalating conflicts, twists and turns, allies and enemies, complications, character growth

120-140	30-35%	Turning point, show character growth beginning
180	45%	Good place for revealing backstory,
200	50%	Major emotional turning point--SECRET REVEALED or LOVE SCENE
220	55%	Goal might change
260	65%	Another secret revealed
300	75%	(or later) Turning point (can be black moment) (sacrifice?) that propels action in a new direction

ACT III

New goal, black moment, action inevitably hurtles toward the ending

340	85%	Last secret revealed (black moment can be here, too)
340-80	85-95%	Climax--highest tension
360-400	90-97%	Plot twist (sacrifice?) leads to resolution
396-400	99%	Resolve romance (or other personal issues)

Tools you can sprinkle throughout:

Characters in Conflict--every page

Sexual Tension

Plant character's worst fear in Act I, make them face it later (Indiana Jones--snakes)

Figure out what character would never do, then make them do it (Pretty Woman--kissing on the lips)(Back to the Future--McFly punching bully)

Show Character Growth (beginning of Act II, and somewhere in Act III)

Ultimate sacrifice for love

Foreshadowing

Unexpected plot twists

Action scenes (or poignant scenes, or scary scenes, or sexy scenes, or funny scenes--depending on your genre)

Secrets revealed

A Place to Hang Your Scenes:
Three-act Structure for Novels (Kara Lennox)

Tools, cont'd:

Theme--look for it after your first draft
Motifs--look for things you've repeated and emphasize significance

Some good movies to watch for three-act structure:

STAR WARS

TOOTSIE

BACK TO THE FUTURE

THE AFRICAN QUEEN

THE WIZARD OF OZ

THE FUGITIVE

WITNESS

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL

These just happen to be ones I've studied; but watch any successful genre film with a stopwatch and discover the turning points and act breaks for yourself. It's fun!

Other Resources

Drew's Script-O-Rama <http://www.script-o-rama.com> Download free screenplays for study

Plot & Structure by James Scott Bell

How to Write a Movie in 21 Days by Viki King

Screenplay, The Foundations of Screenwriting by Syd Field

Making a Good Script Great by Linda Seger

About Kara Lennox:

Kara Lennox is the author of more than fifty romance and romantic-suspense novels for Harlequin, Silhouette and Bantam, as well as more than a dozen screenplays, several of which have been optioned. Her scripts have placed or advanced in several notable screenwriting competitions, including the Austin Heart of Film (top 10 percent), the *Scr(i)pt Magazine* Open Door contest, and the American Accolades. Her script *Grim Reaper, Inc.* tied for first place in the Share the Dream contest, sponsored by RWA's screenwriting special interest chapter, Scriptscene. She can be reached at karalennox@yahoo.com.