

## **NARRATIVE SHORT FILM BEAT SHEET**

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*These are guidelines, not rules. Your Beat Sheet can take a different form, but it should be relatively brief – the idea is to give the reader an overview of your story.*

*A 'Beat' is defined as a significant movement in the story. It could be a scene, a sequence of scenes, or one action/line of dialogue within a scene. You can describe each beat with a couple of sentences or simply a couple of words.*

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### **The set up:**

2 – 3 beats max.

- Introduce your main character and their EXISTING CONFLICT.
- Expand briefly on the nature of their world giving us the information we need to engage in their conflict: this could be a further beat in which we experience the world as your main character does or, if the story requires it, introduce other significant characters.
- Highlight the specific challenge, task or problem that the character is facing RIGHT NOW. This will give the story its dramatic drive and generate audience intrigue or anticipation about how events might unfold.

### **The developing story:**

Describe in a series of approximately 5-10 beats how the story develops, which should include:

- The actions the character takes that complicates their situation.
- What happens to them/what we learn that raises the stakes.
- An attempt to solve the situation that fails.
- A turning point in which what the character now needs/wants is refined to accommodate the complication (or the audience's understanding of what the character wants/needs is refined)

The story beats should follow cause and effect and lead to:

- A NOW OR NEVER moment. In a comedy this might be an unexpected opportunity to seize the upper hand, in a character drama it might be a 'scales falling from the eyes' moment of clarity, in a thriller it would be the moment of greatest threat.

### **The ending:**

1 or 2 beats.

- The moment when the dramatic conflict is resolved one way or the other. It might be helpful to consider this as the 'FINAL BLOW' of the fight that will determine the outcome (for today, at least). It could be that the character finds the resource to rise above their situation and do what is necessary to succeed OR it could be that the situation beats down on them further and 'wins' out. A film with a twist in its tail will, of course, have both.
- If appropriate, a final AFTERMATH beat in which we absorb the immediate impact of the resolution with the character. This beat is most often used to indicate a shift in the character's attitude. Alternatively, the final beat of the film can deliver an OPEN END: a moment which suggests to the audience what is about to happen but which we don't see fully played out on screen.