NETFLIX

Pitch Workshop

NETFLIX
ESSENTIALS

CHARACTER DRIVEN

Viewers develop **relationships** with **characters** not plot.

Their **engagement** depends on whether they relate to the character and **understand** their **motivation**.

If they don't find the character **interesting**, they **won't care** if the character gets what they want.

TEASE THEM AT THE START

The audience **subconsciously decides** whether they will watch your show in the first **5 seconds**!

A good teaser will give the audience **a taste** of who the **character** is, the **central conflict** and **the world**.

Every episode should have a teaser unless the start of the episode is picking up exactly where the last episode ended. Usually in the middle of a dramatic plot twist.

NARRATIVE DRIVE

Does not mean the pace of the show needs to be **fast**.

Hero should be **proactive** in trying to obtain their goal. Overly **reactive heroes are boring.**

Each scene should move **emotional arc** and/ or **plot forward**. Viewers want **new information** from their scenes.

LEAVE THEM HANGING

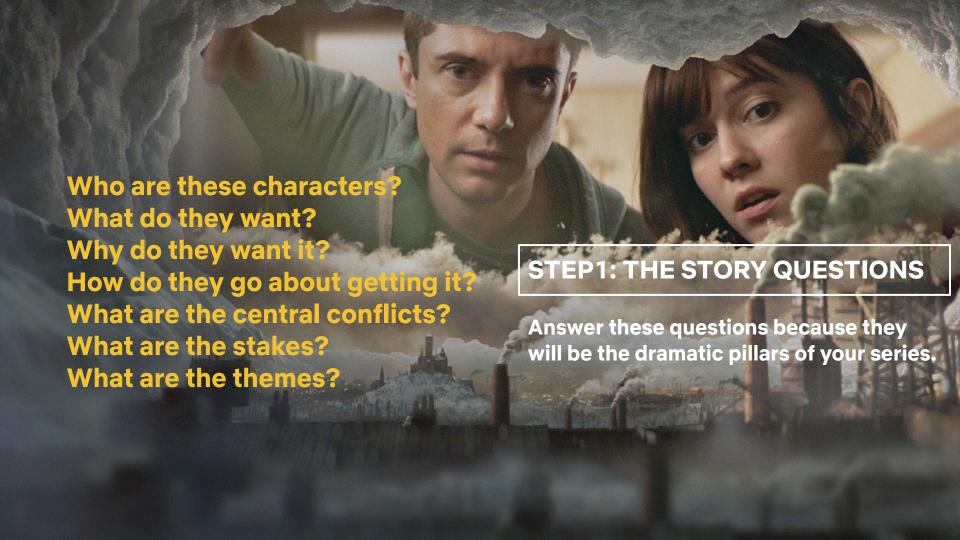**Plot** Cliffhangers are usually **dramatic events** or **plot twist**.

Emotional Cliffhangers are revelations to the hero that have an **impact on their emotional arc**. These can be **small** or **big** moments. But **always impactful**.

Sometimes the reveal can be **only to the viewer** and not the hero.

Needs to be **compelling enough** to **drive viewer interest** to the next episode.
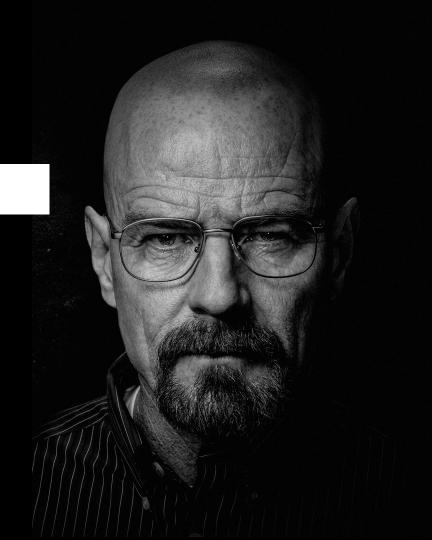
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How To Create a PITCH DOCUMENT

(5 to 10 pages)

1. The Story Questions
2. The Overview
3. The World
4. The Tone
5. Character Descriptions
6. Season Summaries
7. Potential Episodes

Who are these characters?
What do they want?
Why do they want it?
How do they go about getting it?
What are the central conflicts?
What are the stakes?
What are the themes?

STEP1: THE STORY QUESTIONS

Answer these questions because they will be the dramatic pillars of your series.

STEP TWO:

THE OVERVIEW

Includes:

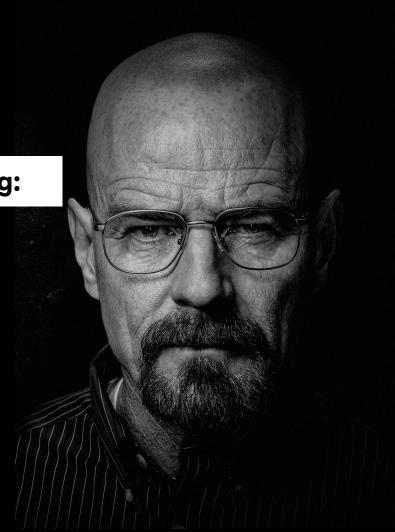- **A short synopsis.**

- **Why this series?**

THE OVERVIEW

The Synopsis Should Have The Following:

WHO is the hero and what do they want?

WHY now and what happens if they don't get what they want?

WHAT is the central conflict?

Keep It
SHORT!

Think "elevator pitch."

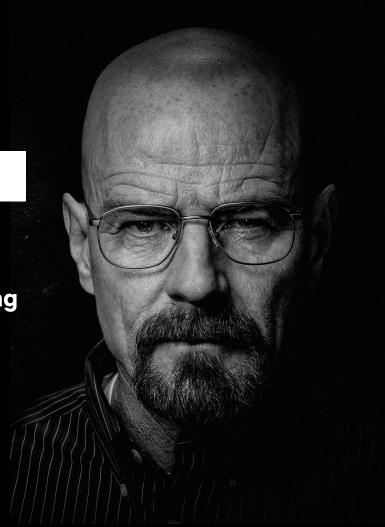**No Backstory.**

Don't get into character dynamics.

Just one paragraph if you can.

STEP TWO:
THE OVERVIEW

Why This Series?:

- What makes the story fresh?

- Are there any relevant hotbed issues being explored?

- Is it personal?

- Tell us more about the themes.

STEP THREE:

TELL US ABOUT YOUR WORLD

WHERE IS YOUR WORLD?
The location should be a character in your story.

WHEN IS YOUR WORLD?
Provide a mythology if in the future or fantasy.
Provide historical perspective if a period piece.

WHAT IS THE PROFESSION?
What you hero does for a living should be part of the world.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR TONE

- The tone is the feeling or atmosphere that you want to convey to the audience when they watch your series.
- Be intentional with your choices. They must help tell the story.
- From dark to light, tone usually matches the emotional resonance of your themes. Revenge=Dark. Love=Light.
- Talk about potential camera and shooting styles.
- Feel free to use movie, television and pictorial references to help communicate your vision.

STEP FIVE:
TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHARACTERS

- **Backstory:**
  - **Any info from their past that informs their desires, motivations and choices they make in your series.**
- **Traits:**
  - **Any values, physical and personality traits that helps bring them to life.**
- **Arcs**
  - **How they change emotional in the series.**

MAKING ROOTWORTHY CHARACTERS

There are three key ingredients that make up Rootworthy Characters: Catalyst, Moral Compass, and Transformation. While all rootworthy characters need these ingredients, there isn't a set order that you need to introduce them - it's all about what works best for the story you want to tell.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOAL

Before you even worry about the 3 ingredients, a compelling story and goal is step one in the process, and helps point viewers towards the characters they are supposed to root for.

Do they have a clear goal?

- ☐ Clear, established motivation
- ☐ An ultimate goal, whether or not the viewer knows the specifics

FILM VS. SERIES

By nature, film pacing needs to be quicker, and audiences need to see more immediate signs of the main ingredients to get and stayed invested in the character. Series have the luxury of the "slow burn" approach to Transformation and more ambiguity in Moral Compass.

KEY INGREDIENTS

CATALYST

Underlying motivation or backstory

Audiences want to know where characters come from.

The Catalyst is the emotionally charged spark that ignites a character's journey. Catalysts should center around one central reason and not just be a disperse backstory or history of the character.

A "Call to Action"
Fulfilling destiny, reaching for success, standing up for yourself

Inherent Altruism
Standing up for those who can't, doing the "right" thing

Personal tragedy
Loss of loved ones, terminal illness, poverty, childhood trauma

MORAL COMPASS

Guiding principles or code

Audiences want a set of rules to help level set expectations for how a character will act.

Moral Compass is the code or rules that characters set for themselves and guide their actions. Moral compasses that resonate are shades of grey, and do NOT need to be in line with the morality of our world as long as they are justifiable in the story world.

Protecting and avenging
Doing almost anything for family or love

Uncovering truth
Doing whatever it takes to bring the truth to light

Fighting for the greater good
Fighting for what's really important, regardless of the cost

TRANSFORMATION

Obstacles and challenges that spur growth

Audiences don't want characters to be perfect, they want growth.

Transformation shows how characters handle and grow from trials and tribulations. It can be either positive or negative, but it needs to exist. Must be consistent with their Moral Compass and make sense given their underlying Catalyst..

Difficult choices and sacrifice
Personal sacrifice for the betterment of their causes

Learning to control skills/power
Slowly improving over time in a talent or skill

Overcoming hardship
Getting through the bad times, often through friendship

CHECK LIST

Do they have a compelling Catalyst?

- ☐ Backstory that shapes Moral Compass
- ☐ Catalyst that is understandable, relatable, or emotionally charged
- ☐ Catalyst that feels organic and true to the character

Do they have a defined Moral Compass?

- ☐ Clear rules and codes they live by
- ☐ Boundaries for things they will/won't do
- ☐ Moral Compass that's tested through Transformation

Do they have a believable Transformation?

- ☐ Clear path/potential to growth
- ☐ Transformation that's in line with their Moral Compass, has a strong connection to their Catalyst

RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

What is their relationship to the hero?

If an ensemble, tell us how do they compete against each other.

Characters going for the same goal but for different motivations makes conflict, which = great drama!

ENSEMBLE STRATEGIES

- **Start the series with your main characters in order of importance. Breaking Bad didn't become an ensemble until the second season.**

- **Chose a character to be the "eyes and ears" of the audience and our introduction to the world. Someone to ask the "stupid questions" or is the expert, so we can get informed about the world.**

- **Don't feel pressure to introduce all the characters at once. You have the time-- It's a series!**

STEP SIX:
SEASON SUMMARIES

- A summary of the character's journey from beginning to end using the major emotional plot points of the season to help tell the story.

- We suggest doing a season summary for each of the Main Characters.

- They can range from a page to a page and a half.
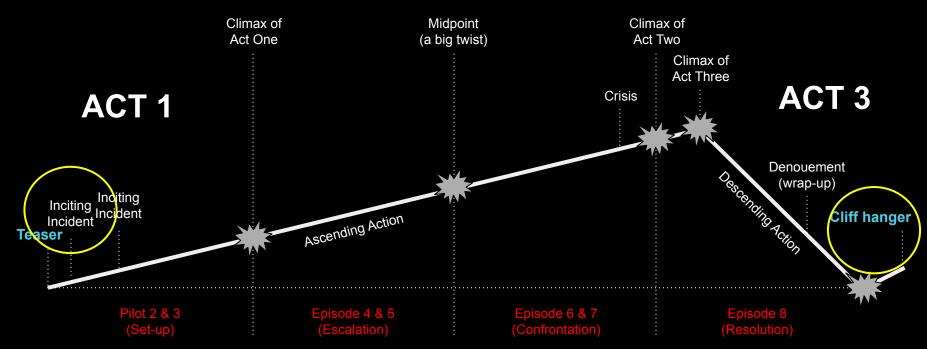
"Instead of focusing on individual episodes, think of the whole season as a layered, three act story."

Todd A. Kessler - Creator

BLOODLINE

Season Map

ACT 2

ACT 1

Climax of
Act One

Midpoint
(a big twist)

Climax of
Act Two

Climax of
Act Three

Crisis

ACT 3

Denouement
(wrap-up)

Inciting
Incident

Inciting
Incident

Ascending Action

Descending Action

Teaser

Cliff hanger

Pilot 2 & 3
(Set-up)

Episode 4 & 5
(Escalation)

Episode 6 & 7
(Confrontation)

Episode 8
(Resolution)

Season Map

ACT 2

Climax of
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Midpoint
(a big twist)

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ACT 3

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(wrap-up)

Descending Action

Inciting
Incident

Cliff hanger

Teaser

Ascending Action

Pilot
(Se...

The viewer will watch the show for an average of 10 minutes before they decide to watch or do something else. If your teaser is strong enough they will stay for the inciting incident which should happen in the first 20 pages of your pilot.

Episode 8
(Resolution)
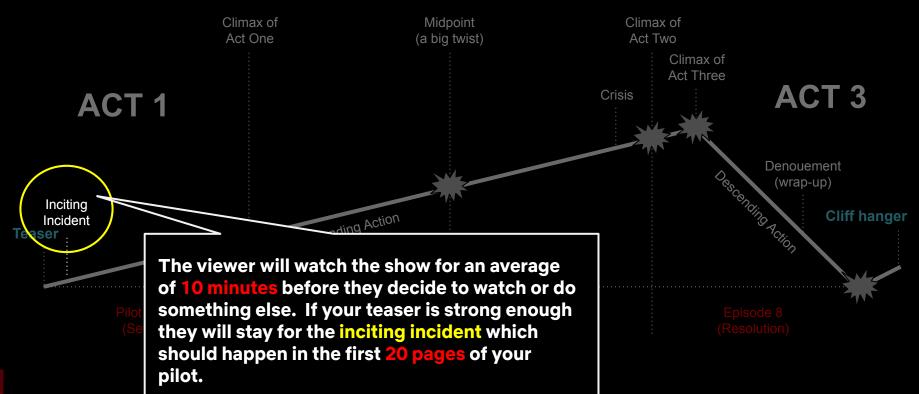
Modern writers have adapted structured models to define character development and storylines.

Comedy's version of Aristotle, writer Dan Harmon, has developed a modern method for structuring the journey of TV and film characters. *Harmon's Story Circle* shows the evolution of characters.

BASIC TENETS OF HARMON'S STORY CIRCLE

Godfather I

Seeks to avenge his father

Hero ventures out to find something they need

Fulfills his destiny, loses innocence
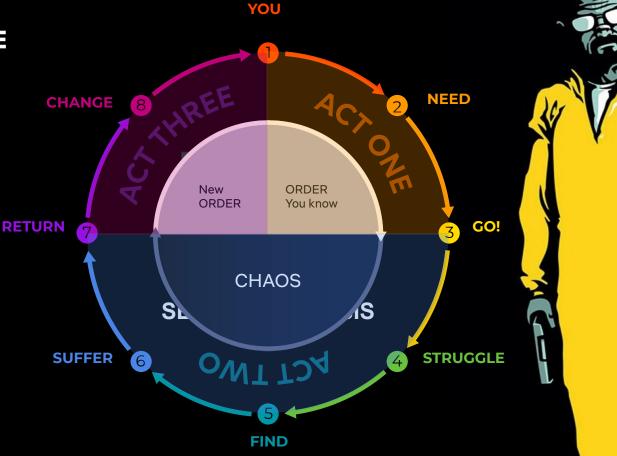
Hero returns having been changed
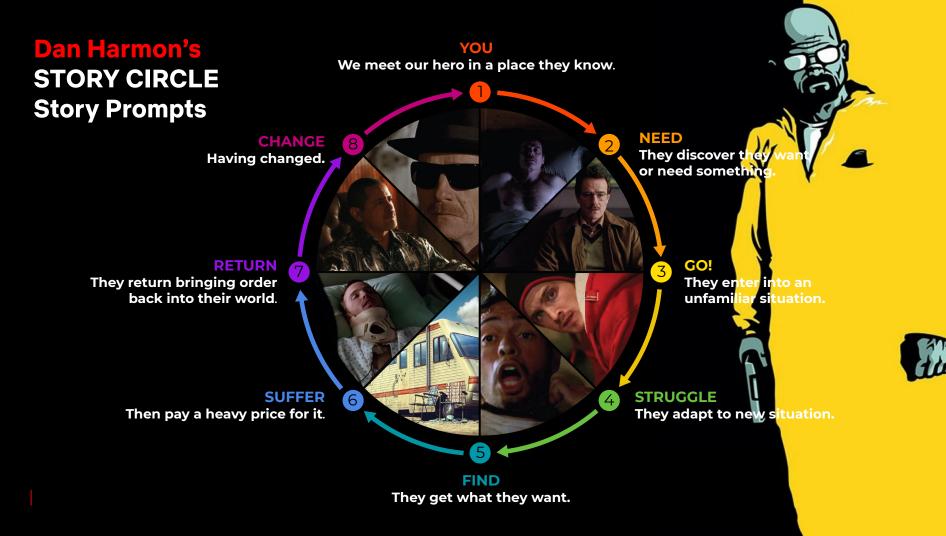
Dan Harmon
film & tv writer

Dan Harmon's STORY CIRCLE Story Prompts

YOU — We meet our hero in a place they know.

NEED — They discover they want or need something.

GO! — They enter into an unfamiliar situation.

STRUGGLE — They adapt to new situation.

FIND — They get what they want.

SUFFER — Then pay a heavy price for it.

RETURN — They return bringing order back into their world.

CHANGE — Having changed.

THE PILOT

- It will be the **most important** episode of your series.

- By the end of your pilot, the viewer **must know:**
  - Who is the **hero**.
  - What they **want**.
  - Their central **conflict**.
  - **Key relationship** dynamics
  - The basic **rules** of the world.
  - The **genre**.
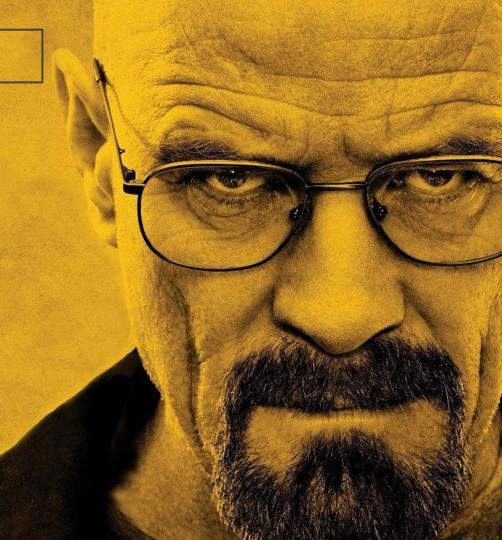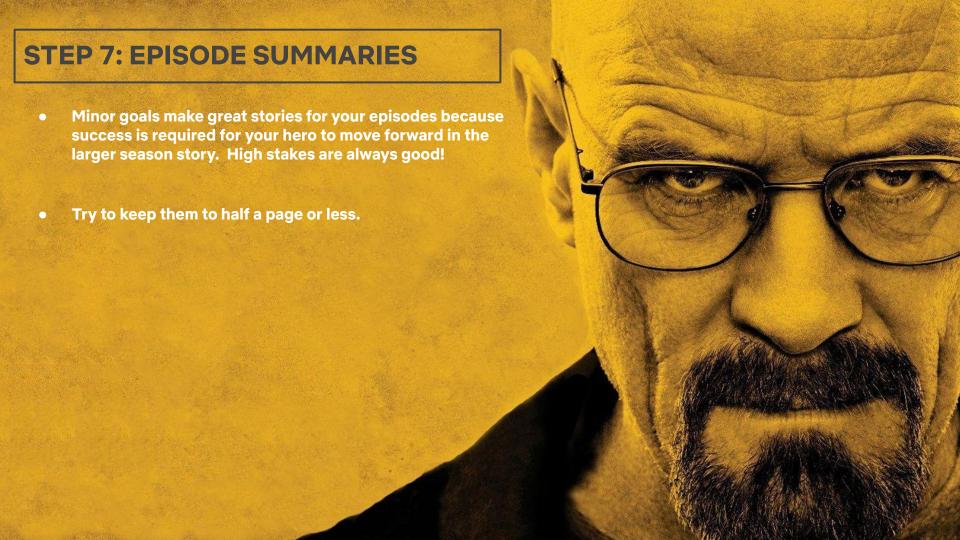
Applying the Harmon Circle in the Writer's Room

You	Need	Go	Struggle	Find	Suffer	Return	Change
The hero in the place they knows							Want + Need for this season
The hero in the place they knows							Want + Need for this season
The hero in the place they knows							Want + Need for this season

Now you have your emotional plot points which will serve as an outline for your season story arcs.

STEP 7: POTENTIAL EPISODES

STEP 7: EPISODE SUMMARIES

- Short paragraphs giving us the beginning, middle and end of the story using only major plot points of the story.

- Use the emotional plot points from the story circle as your episodic map for the season.

- Plot progression and character growth must occur in each episode.

- At the end of each episode, the viewer should be asking themselves - "What's going to happen next?"

- Ask yourself:
  - What are the steps (minor goals) my character needs to take to obtain their main goal?
  - How do we make it as hard as possible for them to be successful?

STEP 7: EPISODE SUMMARIES

- **Minor goals make great stories for your episodes because success is required for your hero to move forward in the larger season story. High stakes are always good!**

- **Try to keep them to half a page or less.**