



## Step-By-Step Screenplay Structure Software User Guide v1.0

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Welcome to the Contour story development system - a system of getting your stories out of your head and down on paper in the shortest amount of time possible. This step-by-step structure tool has generated millions of dollars in script deals and assignments.

Contour enables writers to develop a movie concept from the idea stage to a bulletproof outline. Along the way, Contour guides the writer through plot points of all three acts and explains the major storytelling secrets to crafting a highly marketable movie. The main character's journey is explained through archetypal themes that reverberate in the most financially successful movies of all time. Once the story passes through Contour, the writer can seamlessly transfer their work into Montage, Mariner Software's screenwriting software, to write and start marketing the script.

Some of Contour's features include:

- Flesh out a main character and codify their motivations and behaviors.
- Quickly recognize archetypes which protagonists journey through in all the top movies.
- Go from concept to bulletproof outline in less time than ever before.
- Learn a flexible yet exact plot point and beat structure that works for all genres.
- Seamlessly transfer a concept into popular screenplay writing software such as Montage.
- Develop a compelling logline.

### In This Chapter:

Philosophy of Contour  
Installing & Launching  
Registration  
Check For Updates  
System Requirements & Troubleshooting  
Notes

## Philosophy of Contour

Contour is a streamlined approach to creating a flawless, professionally structured screenplay outline. Unlike other systems you don't need to know a lot of tedious screenwriting theory in order to get started writing. There are only 6 basic concepts you need to know in order to use Contour system:

Screenplays have **3 acts**. Act one is 27 pages long, act two is twice as long at 54 pages long, and act three is once again 27 pages long.

All of the top movies clearly answer **4 simple questions**:

Who is your main character?

What is he trying to accomplish?

Who is trying to stop him?

What happens if he fails?

## Mac OS X Technologies in Contour



**Universal**



**Spotlight**



**Applescript**

In all of the top movies, the main character moves through **4 distinct archetypes** during the course of the movie:

In act one, the main character is or becomes an **orphan**.

In the first half of act two, the main character is a **wanderer**.

In the second half of act two, the main character becomes a **warrior**.

In act three, the main character becomes a **martyr**.

Act one ends and act two begins with the clear statement of something called **the central question**. The central question is the question that, once it's answered definitively yes' or no', the movie is over.

All of the top films can tell their full story using a very simple **formula**. More than just a logline, this formula totally lays out all three acts in 60 to 80 words.

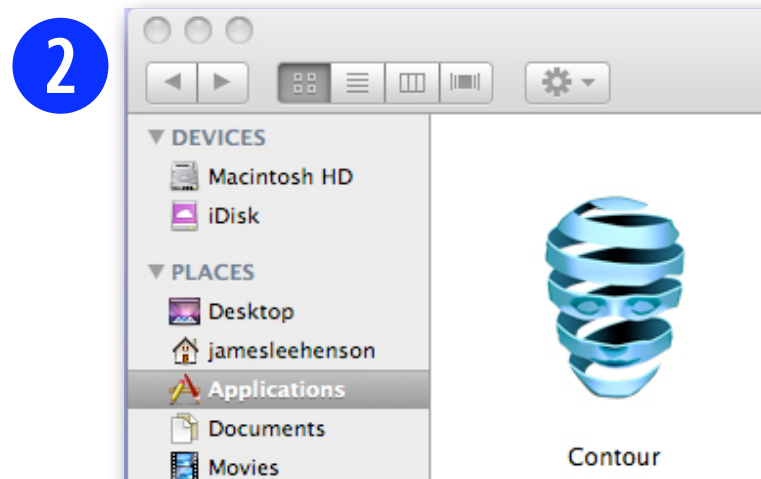
Contour uses a liberating system of **plot points** which are discreet, unique, and essential chunks of story information. These plot points work for absolutely every genre and are specific enough to guide you while general enough to ensure your stories are unique and special.

And incredibly, that's all theory you need to know to start using Contour.

## Installing & Launching

To install Contour:

- 1 Mount the disk image by double-clicking on the Contour.dmg file in the Finder.
- 2 Drag and drop the Contour icon onto your Applications folder. Contour is copied onto your hard drive.
- 3 Once the copying is complete, you're ready to start using Contour.
- 4 Launch Contour by navigating to your applications folder and double-clicking the Contour icon.



## Registration

To register Contour:

- When you first launch Contour you are prompted to register the software or operate it in Demo Mode
- Click on the hyperlink to go to the Mariner eStore to purchase a license if you haven't done so already.
- Click Enter Serial. . . to enter your serial number.
- Click Not Yet to continue to use the software in trial mode.

*Note: The trial period lasts 30 consecutive days from the first time you enter into the trial period. After this trial period you will either need to purchase a license to continue using the software or discard it from your computer.*





To register Contour (*continued*):

- 1 Click the Enter Serial button (previous page).
- 2 Enter your name.
- 3 Enter your name. Enter your serial number.  
Your serial number was either provided on the back of the disk sleeve on a sticker or in an email receipt.
- 4 Click OK when you are finished.

Note: The serial number will be in the format of:

CNXXX-XX-XXX-XXXXXX-XXXXXXX

Hint: Your serial number can be found in the General pane of Preferences. Further help can be obtained on the Mariner Software website at:

<http://www.marinersoftware.com/sitepage.php?page=104>

The image shows a 'Serialize' dialog box with the following fields and buttons:

- Title: **Serialize**
- Text: Please serialize your copy of Contour
- Field 1: Name: [ ] (Callout 2)
- Field 2: Organization: [ ]
- Field 3: Serial Number: [ ] (Callout 3)
- Buttons: Buy Now, Cancel, OK (Callout 4)

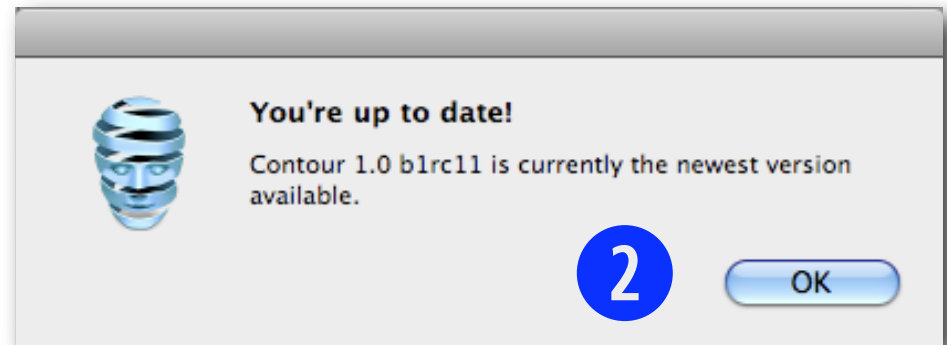
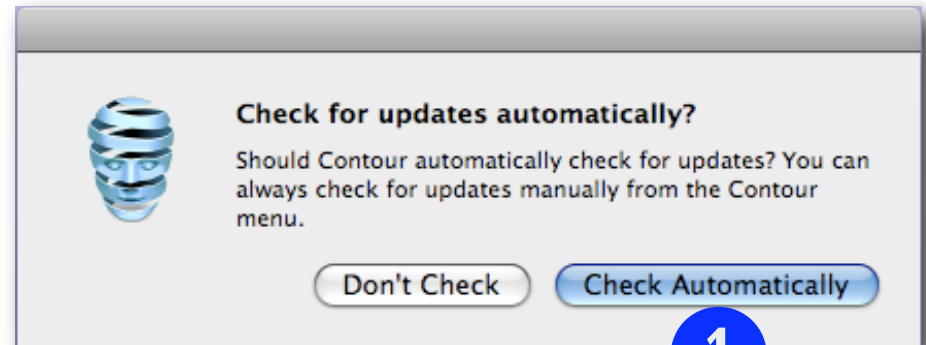
## Check For Updates

When Contour starts up, or at any time you'd like, you can check for updates. Here's how:

On first start up, a dialog appears.

- 1 Click the Check Automatically button. Contour will now check for updates on every launch.
- 2 When you check for updates a dialog appears letting you know you are either up-to-date or there is a new version to download.

*Note: You can always check for updates manually from either the Contour menu>Check for Updates... or from the Help menu.*



# System Requirements & Troubleshooting

## Hardware and Software Requirements

To use Contour you need:

- at least 128 MB (megabytes) of available memory (RAM)
- at least 100 MB free hard disk space
- Mac OS X 10.3.9 or above

## Troubleshooting

If you have a question about using Contour, try finding the answers you need in this document or in the Contour help. Alternatively, try the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page on our web site.

View it at: <http://marinersoftware.com/sitepage.php?page=24>.

You may also visit our online forum at: <http://marinersoftware.com/forum/>.

If you still can't find the information you need, contact Mariner Software by phone, fax, or email.

**Email:** [support@marinersoftware.com](mailto:support@marinersoftware.com)

**Phone:** (612) 529-3770; Voice support, 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. Eastern Standard Time

**Fax:** (612) 529-3775

**Mail:** Mariner Software, Inc.  
401 N. 3rd Street 665  
Minneapolis, MN 55401  
USA

For updates, tips and tricks, information about other Mariner products, user group discount information, and articles for user group newsletter publication, visit our web site at:

<http://marinersoftware.com>

# Contour Notes

## Notes

Before using Contour, you should have a basic knowledge of Mac OS X. You should understand pointing, clicking, double-clicking, dragging, and how to choose menu commands. You should also know how to operate dialog boxes, re-size windows, and use the Clipboard. If you aren't familiar with these or other basic Macintosh operations or terminology, refer to the Macintosh® Help documentation included with your computer.

## Errors

If you find any bugs or errors in the program, please send detailed information to [support@marinersoftware.com](mailto:support@marinersoftware.com).

For a crash of the Application, its usually helpful for us to know the version of Contour you are using, the version of OS X you are running, and lastly, the kind of computer you have with which the problem occurs.

## Thanks

Thank you to those who have helped improve this product with suggestions, information or bug reports.

## Chapter 2: Process Overview

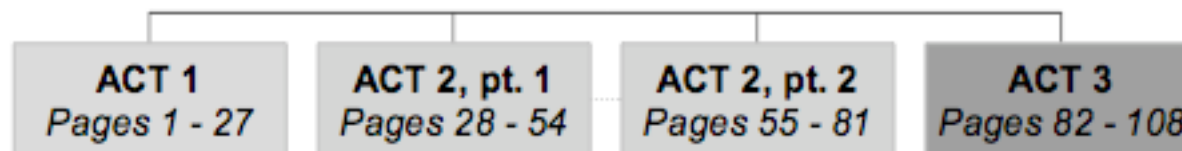
**C**ontour is a multi-step approach to producing a structurally sound outline from which to write screenplays, guiding the writer from script idea to the final beat of Act III.

The software is laid out in a step by step manner, with a progress meter to show the writer where they are in the process.

In order to understand the Contour process, several key concepts are defined below:

### Three Act Structure

In structuring a screenplay, there are three Acts -- the Beginning, the Middle, and the End. Act I and Act III are the same length, with Act II being as long as both Acts I and III combined. In the Contour method, Act II is divided in half for reasons which will be discussed later.



### In This Chapter:

Three Act Structure

The Four Questions

The Four Archetypes

The Central Question

The Formula

Plot Points

## The Four Questions

In ascertaining whether a story is worth telling, any story idea is subjected to the Four Questions:

1. Who is your main character?
2. What is he trying to accomplish?
3. Who is trying to stop him?
4. What happens if he fails?

Title	Who is your main character?	What is he trying to accomplish?	Who is trying to stop him?	What will happen if he fails?
Titanic	Jack Dawson	Save himself and Rose from the sinking Titanic	Cal Hockley (Rose's fiancée)	He and woman he loves will die.
Star Wars	Luke Skywalker	Rescue the princess and destroy the Death Star	Grand Moff Tarkin	Princess Leia dies and the Rebels are destroyed
E.T.	Elliot	Save E.T's life and get him back home	Keys (The Scientist)	E.T. dies.
Spider Man	Peter Parker	Defeat the Green Goblin and save Mary Jane's life	Norman Osborn (The Green Goblin)	Mary Jane and the victims of the Green Goblin die.
Jurassic Park	Dr. Alan Grant	Save everyone's life and get off the island	The Dinosaurs	Everyone Dies, including the kids and the girl he loves.

*Examples of the Four Questions as they are applied to some of the highest grossing films*

## The Four Archetypes

There are six archetypes that real-life people live by: Innocent, Orphan, Magician, Wanderer, Martyr and Warrior. The theory is that people make certain choices about how to live their lives and how to respond to various issues based on their defining archetype.

Contour utilizes four out of the six archetypes -- Orphan, Wanderer, Warrior, and Martyr. Understanding how the protagonist moves through them during the course of a story will bring the writer extremely close to a character-driven script. The four archetypes and where they fall within the three act structure are charted graphically below.

ACT I	ACT II, 1ST HALF	ACT II, 2ND HALF	ACT III
ORPHAN	WANDERER	WARRIOR	MARTYR

In Act I, the Orphan is sometimes a real orphan; sometimes a figurative one. At times, the cause of his orphanhood is outside of his control, yet at other times, it's by choice by distancing himself from family and love because of duty, iconoclasm, selfishness, or emotional reserve. In some way, shape, or form, the Orphan is unique from the rest of the world around him. Think Clark Kent in SUPERMAN or Cole, the boy who sees dead people in THE SIXTH SENSE.

In the first half of Act II, the protagonist becomes a Wanderer in order to answer the Central Question. He looks for clues, meets helpers, runs into opponents, and overcomes obstacles, along with acquiring the skills and tools he thinks he needs to answer the Central Question.

By the mid-point of the film, around page 55, the geographic center of Act II, the protagonist has acquired most of the helpers, as well as the skills and items necessary in order to resolve the Central Question to his satisfaction -- or he has just flat out run out of time. One way or another, it's time to act. . .it is time to become a Warrior. In JAWS, Brody goes out on the boat to fight and kill the shark, while in TITANIC Jack and Rose fight to get away from Cal and off the boat before it sinks.

The Warrior gets bloodied and beaten, but he always has a reserve to tap into, until near the end of Act II, when he dies, either literally or figuratively. He goes to the place of his darkest nightmare; very often, it's a cave or enclosed space. Here, after his "death", he is reborn and understands how to resolve the Central Question once and for all. E.T. is taken into a tented, cave-like room within the house, dies, and then is reborn as the spaceship gets close. In JURASSIC PARK, Joseph Mazzello's character Tim is electrocuted on the fence, but Dr. Grant resuscitates him.

The Protagonist must be willing to die and not be reborn in order to answer the Central Question. He must be willing to be a Martyr. Only by a willingness to lose it all can he win it all.

The secret of the martyr beat is that the protagonist is no longer motivated by the possibility of success. He is motivated solely by the desire to do what is right or what is necessary, regardless of the consequences. Once he gives up the thought of winning, once he embraces the transition from warrior to martyr, fate or nature or God rewards him by giving him what he no longer dared hoped to get: success. Maybe, if he's lucky, it's what he needed all along.

An interesting variation on the martyr beat is that sometimes it can belong to a character other than the protagonist with the protagonist learning and being motivated from this example of another.



## The Central Question

Throughout the story, the Protagonist moves closer and closer to answering the Central Question; once the question is answered, the story is over. *Will Luke Skywalker save the Princess? Will Rocky beat Apollo Creed and become champion? Will Marty McFly go back to the future? Will Erin Brockovich's actions make a difference? Will Batman beat the Joker and Harvey Two Face and save Gotham City once more?*

## The Formula

The Formula is helpful in distilling a story down its basic logline, and is an indispensable and necessary step in determining whether the glimmer of an idea is going to be worth the effort.

**“When a TYPE OF PERSON has/does/wants/gets A, he gets/does/tries/learns B, only to discover that C now happens and he must respond by doing D.”**

The “A” statement is the Orphan statement.

The “B” statement is the Wanderer statement.

The “C” statement is the Warrior statement.

The “D” statement is the Martyr statement.

Using E.T. as an example: *When a lonely boy finds a stranded space alien (“A” statement / ORPHAN statement), he decides to keep him as a pet (“B” statement / WANDERER statement), only to discover that since the alien can't live on earth for too much longer he will try to get it home (“C” statement / WARRIOR statement), but in order to do so he will have to thwart the efforts of a team of scientists. (“D” statement / MARTYR statement.)*

## Plot Points

A plot point is a discreet, unique and essential chunk of story information. In the hierarchy of scriptwriting it falls out above beats and scenes and just below acts. A linear breakdown is supplied below.

### Screenplay > Act > Plot Point > Scene > Beat

Forty-four plot points are needed to tell the story; it's up to the writer to figure out how many beats and scenes are necessary to flesh out those plot points. Using more or less than forty-four plot points will diminish the effectiveness of the structure.

The forty-four plot points are divided over the three act structure as follows:

- There are twelve plot points in Act I -- the Orphan phase of the script -- followed by the *Central Question*, which is the question that, once it's answered definitively "yes" or "no," the story -- and the film -- is over.
- In the first half of Act II -- the Wanderer phase -- there are fourteen plot points.
- There are another fourteen plot points in the second half of Act II -- the Warrior phase.
- And finally, there are four plot points in the Martyr phase, Act III.

These forty-four plot points will be discussed at length later in the manual.

These are the basics of the Contour method, and now, it's time to put these concepts into practice.

## Chapter 3: Adding a Screenplay

**S**o you have an idea for a movie. How do you know if it's worth writing? The first step in finding out if your idea passes muster in the Contour method, the idea must first be added as a new screenplay.

### In This Chapter:

The User Interface

Adding a Screenplay

Deleting a Screenplay

# The User Interface

Contour is made up of several parts. The overarching part is the concept, the contour system of story development. The user interface, the documentation, and more. The following is a breakdown of the user interface.

## Main Window

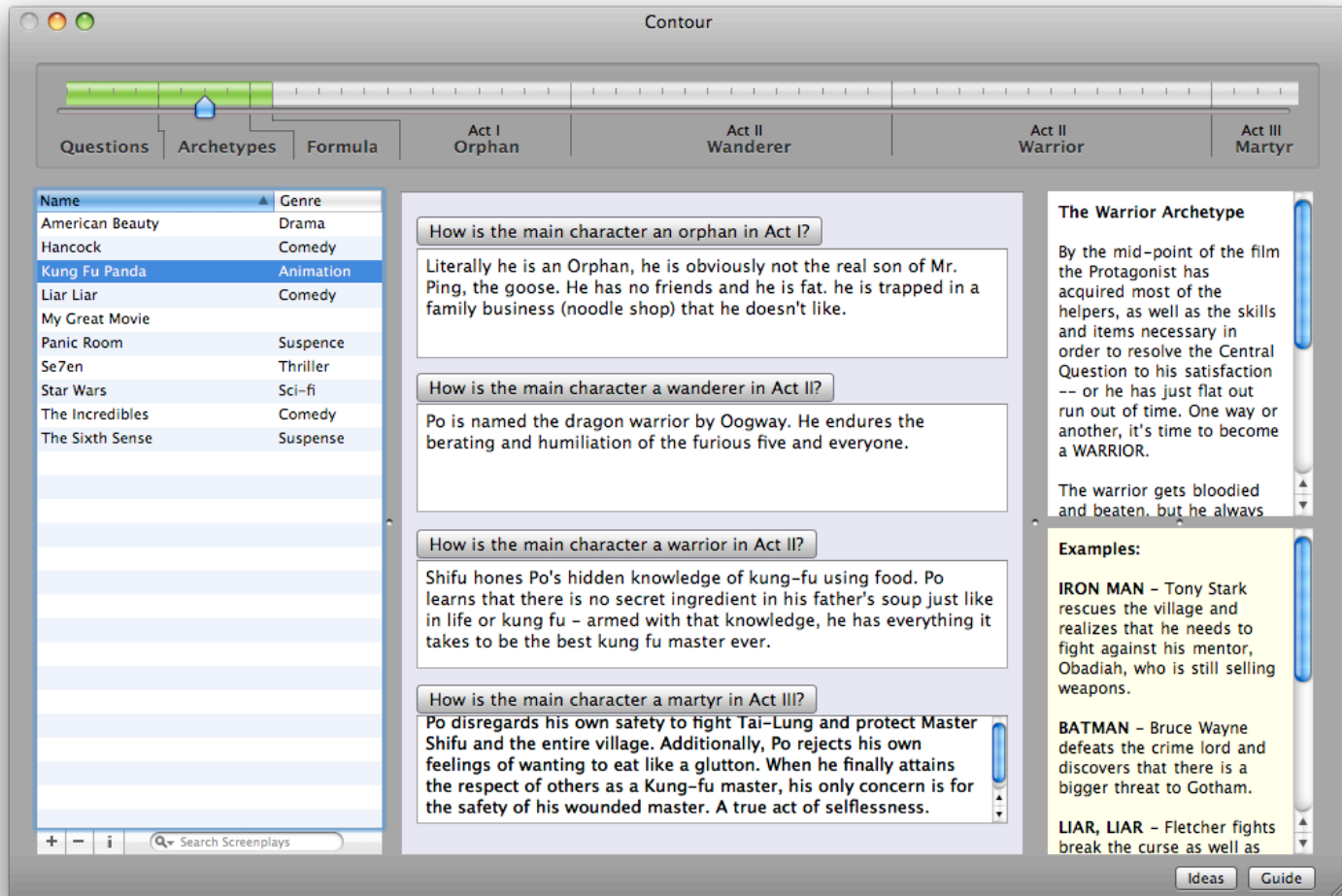
Contour's main window contains several parts.

**Progress Meter** - shows your progress in every section and allows you to navigate

**Screenplay List pane** - a list of the sample screenplay structures and ones you create

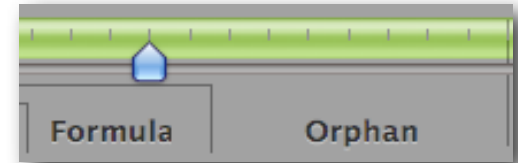
**Content Pane** - The content for the step-by-step process appears here

**Tips and Examples** - Tips explaining the concepts and examples of major films.



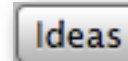
## Progress Meter

The progress meter provides you the ability to see the progress of your idea in a timeline fashion. Each “tick” along the timeline is equal to a step requiring thoughtful development.



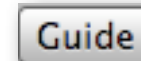
## Ideas Button

Pressing the Ideas button, located at the lower right hand corner of the screen, provides you with a floating pane in which to store ideas. These ideas appear no matter what screenplay you are working on. Go ahead and record that inspiration when it comes to you.



## Guide Button

Pressing the Guide button provides yet another pane in which you can outline your story. The guide shows where major events fall out in your screenplay with approximate page numbers and a Mnemonic guide to help you remember what occurs where.



Contour provides many different ways to help you create the most structurally sound story possible.

## Adding a Screenplay

A Screenplay outline in Contour can be added in three different ways.


Using the menu or keyboard, here's how:

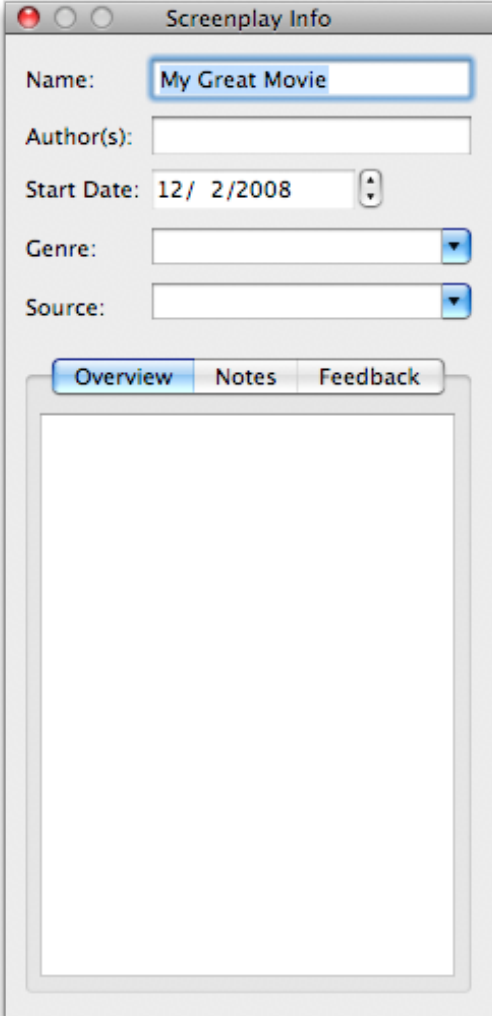
- 1 Click on the File menu, and choose New Screenplay or press Command (⌘), Shift (⇧), and N.

The Info Pane appears

- 2 Enter the title (or working title) of your screenplay.
- 3 Enter any relevant information into the screenplay information panel.

To add a screenplay from the Screenplays Pane:

- 1 Click the Add button  in the lower-left corner.
- 2 Repeat Steps 2 and 3 as listed above.



Screenplay Info

Name: My Great Movie

Author(s):

Start Date: 12/ 2/2008

Genre:

Source:


Overview Notes Feedback

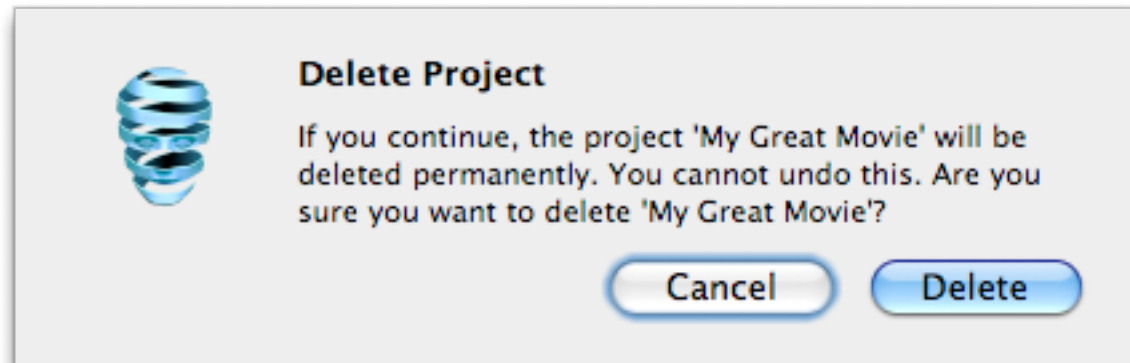
## Deleting a Screenplay

A Screenplay outline in Contour can be removed in a few different ways. Here's how:

- 1 Click on the title to be removed.
- 2 Choose File.
- 3 Choose Delete Screenplay.  
A confirmation sheet appears.
- 4 Click Delete to confirm.

To delete a screenplay from the Screenplays Pane:

- 1 Click on the title to be removed.
- 2 Click on the delete (minus) button  in the Screenplay pane.



## Chapter 4: The Four Questions

### In This Chapter:

### Answering the Four Questions

The first, great mistake of every failed screenplay can often be traced to a weak central idea. A seemingly good idea runs out of steam around page 55 or so -- the halfway point. The key is to recognize a strong idea from an inherently weak one.

Four basic questions must be asked when developing your story:

1. Who is your main character?
2. What is he trying to accomplish?
3. Who is trying to stop him?
4. What happens if he fails?

If there's any vagueness answering the questions, do not continue with the idea until you can clearly answer the questions.

Here are some guidelines:

Your character should be a sympathetic person. Give us someone we can root for.

Your character should have a compelling goal. (*Compelling to the audience too*)

Your main character needs an opponent who should be as committed to your main character's failure as your main character is committed to success.

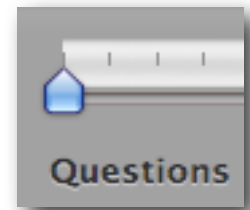
The stakes are life and death. Either literally, or figuratively, the hero's life is over if they fail.



## Answering the Four Questions

Using the screenplay idea of your choice, answer the four questions.

2



- 1 Choose your Screenplay in the Title pane.
- 2 Move the slider to the first tick in the Questions area.
- 3 Enter your answer to “Who is the Main Character?”.
- 4 Press the tab key to move to the second question.
- 5 Enter your answer to “What is he trying to accomplish?”
- 6 Press the tab key to move to the third question.
- 7 Enter your answer to “Who is trying to stop him?”
- 8 Press the tab key to move to the fourth question.
- 9 Enter your answer to “What happens if he fails?”

### Hint:

If you need some extra coaching, cursor over the field to bring up a dialogue box with further information about the question.

Who is the main character?  
Mr. Incredible/Bob

What is he trying to accomplish?  
Wants he and his family to live as their true selves – Super Heroes – while balancing a "normal" family life.

Who is trying to stop him?  
Syndrome is trying to kill off the remaining true Super Heroes. Through his technology he will make everyone a "Super Hero" – therefore nobody will be a Super Hero.

What happens if he fails?  
If he fails he will die, his family will die, all remaining real Super Heroes will die, and the public will be tricked into believing that Syndrome is the one real Super Hero.

## Chapter 5: The Archetypes

**N**ow that the four questions are answered, it's time to take a good, hard look at the protagonist in your story to define his journey from Orphan, to Wanderer, to Warrior, and finally, to Martyr as discussed in Chapter 2.

Spend some time considering your protagonist's journey. You'll be spending a lot of time with this individual, so make sure that you know what makes them tick. How they act and behave based on what they've done in the past

### In This Chapter:

Entering Archetype Information

## Entering Archetype Information

Taking the screenplay idea of your choice, answer the four questions.

- 1 Click on the title in the Screenplay Title pane.
- 2 Press the tab key to move to the first archetype question.
- 3 Enter your answer to “How is the main character an Orphan in Act I?”
- 4 Press the tab key to move to the second archetype question.
- 5 Enter your answer to “How is the Main Character a Wanderer in Act II?”
- 6 Press the tab key to move to the third archetype question.
- 7 Enter your answer to “How is the main character a Warrior in Act II?”
- 8 Press the tab key to move to the fourth archetype question.
- 9 Enter your answer to “How is the main character a Martyr in Act III?”

How is the main character an orphan in Act I?

Mr. Incredible becomes an orphan when Super Heroes become public outcasts.

How is the main character a wanderer in Act II?

Mr. Incredible wanders through the everyday trials of civilian life, never quite fitting in. He then wanders through his new double life, not pulling that off either.

How is the main character a warrior in Act II?

Mr. Incredible springs forth out of defeat and fights alongside his family.

How is the main character a martyr in Act III?

He gives up his "working alone" ethos as a Super Hero and embraces working with his Super Hero family to defeat his foe. At the same time he accepts and embraces balancing a "normal life" with his family.

## Chapter 6: The Formula

One of the concepts that we discussed in Chapter 2 was the concept of the formula, which amplifies, expands, and clarifies the protagonist's his journey from Orphan, to Wanderer, to Warrior, and finally, to Martyr. It serves as the logline for the script which is necessary for pitching a script to an agent, studio, or production company. It also serves as the creative mission statement for your screenplay and acts as a promise to the audience of what the film will be about.

The Formula, broken down into its most basic form is as follows:

**“When a type of person has/does/wants/gets A, he gets/does/tries/learns B, only to discover that C now happens and he must respond by doing D.”**

The “A” statement is the ORPHAN STATEMENT.

The “B” statement is the WANDERER STATEMENT

The “C” statement is the WARRIOR STATEMENT

The “D” statement is the MARTYR STATEMENT

As we break down the formula for HOME ALONE, we'll stop and give you a chance to construct the statements for your own formula.

*When an under-appreciated boy is accidentally left behind by his family when they leave for a European vacation, he must learn how to take care of himself and be the man of the house. . . only to discover that his house has been targeted by bumbling burglars whom he thwarts several times before realizing that they know that he is alone and are coming back, and he must now single-handedly defend the house.*

### In This Chapter:

Constructing the “A” (Orphan) Statement

Constructing the “B” (Wanderer) Statement

Constructing the “C” (Warrior) Statement

Constructing the “D” (Martyr) Statement

## Constructing the “A” (Orphan) Statement

Remember that all journeys begin with the Orphan Archetype, who is unique in some way, shape or form, either intentionally or unintentionally. Let’s compare the Contour “A” statement -- the Orphan Statement -- with the “A” statement for HOME ALONE:

**The “A” Statement:**                               **“When a type of person has/does/wants/gets A. . .”**

**The HOME ALONE Statement:**       *When an under-appreciated boy is accidentally left behind by his family when they leave for a European vacation. . .”*

Notice the first thing they have in common: it’s not “When a *person*” but rather “When a *type* of person.”

Therefore, the first task is to choose an adjective or a phrase for the person’s “type” that connotes the undeserved misfortune or character trait your hero needs to overcome, such as “an under-appreciated boy”, or a “young woman, **trapped in an arranged marriage**, or a “**money-loving** German industrialist”. The adjective indicates the arc the hero will travel; the lonely boy won’t be lonely anymore, the young woman will no longer be trapped, and the German industrialist will learn that money isn’t everything.

The second task is to complete the statement, which alludes to the Central Question -- and what is the Central Question? Once more, the Central Question is the question that once it is answered definitively, the story is over.

Let’s construct the “A” statement as it pertains to your story:

- 1 Click in The Formula field. Begin the sentence with “When”, and then describe the protagonist with an adjective or a phrase which will indicate the arc he or she will travel.
- 2 Complete the rest of the “A” statement.

## Constructing the “B” (Wanderer) Statement

The second part of the formula is the “B” statement, which is the Wanderer Statement. Remember that the Wanderer’s journey centers around the protagonist gathering the knowledge and the support system he thinks he needs in order to answer the Central Question.

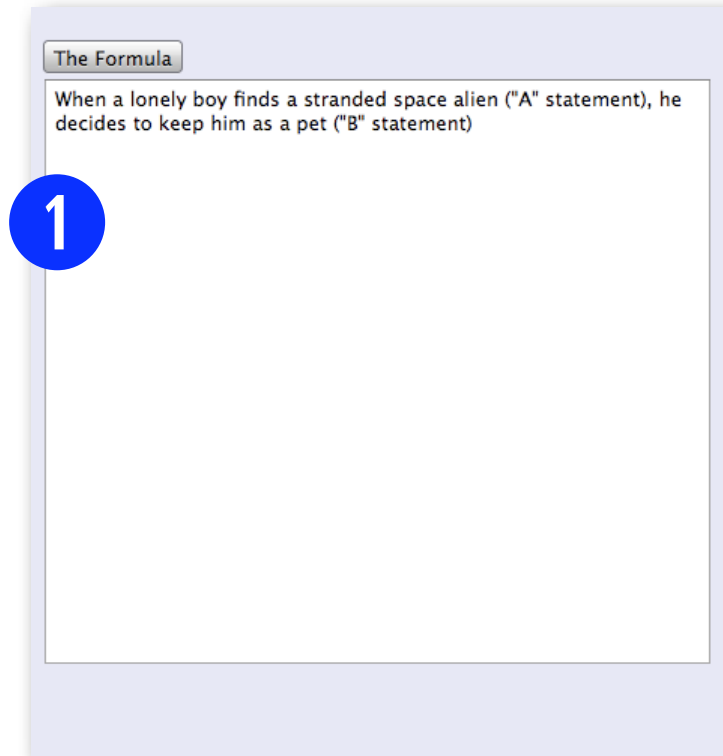
**The Wanderer Statement:** “. . .he gets/does/tries/learns B. . .”

**The Home Alone Statement:** “. . .he must learn how to take care of himself and be the man of the house. . .”

This is where the **orphan** morphs into the **wanderer**; in this case, Kevin learns what it means to be the man of the house -- getting groceries, ordering food in, and taking care of the place, which is all uncharted territory for him. In ET, Elliot becomes the Wanderer as he learns to care for the alien, and enlists the assistance of his brother Tommy and his sister Gert to keep ET’s existence a secret from his mother.

Let's take a moment to construct your "B" or Wanderer statement. It's assumed that you are already in the Formula field and have just concluded writing your "A" statement.

- 1 Give yourself some room to write your "B" statement. Once you're happy with your "B" statement, connect the two statements together with a comma. You're halfway there!



The Formula

When a lonely boy finds a stranded space alien ("A" statement), he decides to keep him as a pet ("B" statement)

1

## Constructing the “C” (Warrior) Statement

The third part of the formula, the “C” statement, is the Warrior statement, where the Warrior springs into action either after learning all he needs to know in order to answer the Central Question, or because that he’s run out of time and has no choice but to act.

**The Warrior Statement:** “. . .only to discover that C now happens. . .“

**The Home Alone Statement:** “. . .only to discover that his house has been targeted by bumbling burglars whom he thwarts several times before realizing that they know that he is alone and are coming back. . .”

**“. . .only to discover that his house has been targeted by bumbling burglars whom he thwarts several times before realizing that they know that he is alone and are coming back. . .”**

This is where the mid-Act II archetype switchover from **wanderer** to **warrior**. “Only to discover” are the vital three words. It implies that something surprising happens; things go off in a new direction. Kevin knew that there were burglars around, knew that they tried to break in, but it is only in the middle of Act II that he realizes that they’re coming back. In ET, Elliott becomes the Warrior when it becomes a race against time for Elliott to return ET home before he dies, only to discover that government scientists are after them.



Now construct your “C” or Warrior statement:

- 1 Give yourself a little room after your “A” and “B” statements to write your “C” statement. Once you’re satisfied with your “C” statement, connect the three statements together. You’re almost done!

The Formula

When a lonely boy finds a stranded space alien (“A” statement), he decides to keep him as a pet (“B” statement), only to discover that since the alien can’t live on earth for too much longer he will try to get it home (“C” statement).]

1

## Constructing the “D” (Martyr) Statement

So far, the protagonist has been an Orphan, a Wanderer, and a Warrior. It’s time for him to sacrifice it all and become the martyr who will finally answer the Central Question.

**The Warrior Statement:** “. . .and he must respond by doing D.”

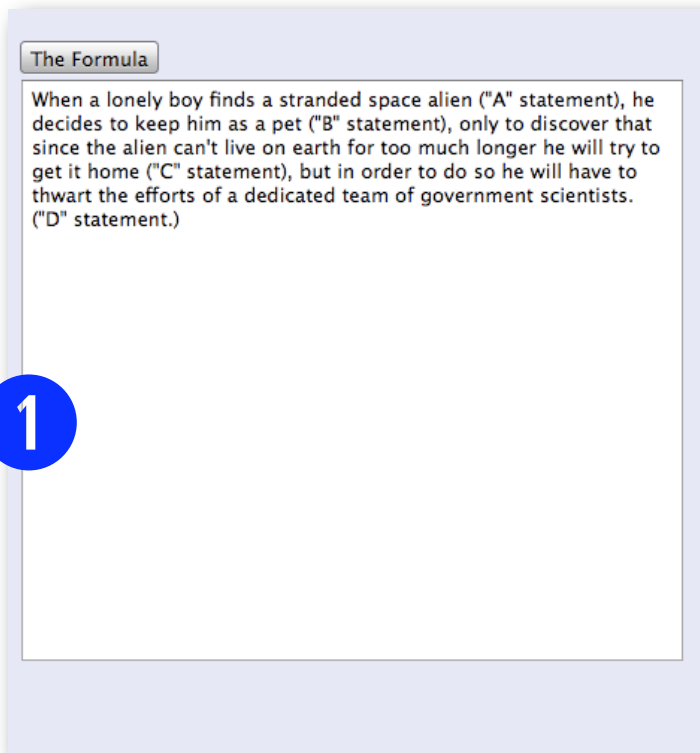
**The Home Alone Statement:** “. . .and he must now single-handedly defend the house.”

This is the true start of the Act III action as he acts on his early realization that he is truly the “man of the house” and takes steps to defend it himself. He could run off and find some grown-up to help him, but he won’t. . .he can’t. He goes from **warrior** to **martyr**. In ET, Elliott must let go of all physical and psychic ties to ET for him to die and to be reborn. In TITANIC, Jack sacrifices his life, freezing to death, so that Rose -- and their love for each other -- can survive.

It's time to write your "D" or Martyr statement. Again, it's assumed you've just written the previous statements and you're still in The Formula field:

- 1 Give yourself a little room after your Orphan, Wanderer and Warrior statements to write your Martyr statement. Once you're satisfied with it, connect the four statements.

Don't be afraid to spend some time writing and refining the Formula for your story; if you are not clear about your story and what it's all about, no one else will be, either. Applying the formula is an indispensable and necessary step in determining whether the idea is going to be worth the effort.



The Formula

When a lonely boy finds a stranded space alien ("A" statement), he decides to keep him as a pet ("B" statement), only to discover that since the alien can't live on earth for too much longer he will try to get it home ("C" statement), but in order to do so he will have to thwart the efforts of a dedicated team of government scientists. ("D" statement.)

1

## Chapter 7: Act I Structure

**W**ith the Central Question established, and always in the forefront, it's time to get specific about how we're going to answer it within the 108-115 pages of our screenplay.

We've previously discussed a screenplay being divided into three acts, and how if you divide the second act in half, you'll have four sections of approximately the same length.

We also mentioned that a script is made up exactly 44 plot points -- no more and no less. Remember that a plot point is a discreet, unique and essential chunk of story information. In the hierarchy of screenwriting, it exists above beats and scenes and just below acts.

Now, it's time to focus on Act I, with our hero in their Orphan stage of Archetypal development.

### In This Chapter:

Developing Act I Plot Points

Plot Point 1

Plot Point 2

Plot Point 3

Plot Point 4

Plot Point 5

Plot Point 6

Plot Point 7

Plot Point 8

Plot Point 9

Plot Point 10

Plot Point 11

Plot Point 12

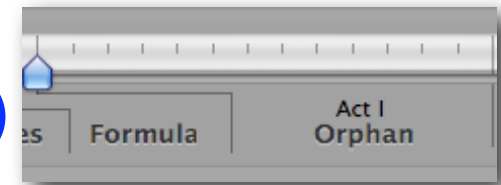
Reiterating the Central Question

# Developing Act I Plot Points

- 1 Choose your Screenplay from the Title pane.
- 2 Click on the slider and drag it over to the first Orphan tick.
- 3 Click in each plot point and develop it as it applies to your story.
- 4 Click on the slider and drag it to the next tick in the Orphan section.
- 5 Enter the information for the next plot point.
- 6 Repeat steps 4 & 5 until all of the plot points are complete.



Name	Genre
Se7en	Thriller
Reunion	Horror
Panic Room	Thriller
Star Wars	
The Sixth Sense	Suspense
The Incredibles	Comedy
Liar Liar	Comedy
My Great Movie	
American Beauty	Drama
Family Reunion	Horror
ET	Adventure



## Plot Point I

### **We meet either the Hero, Victim/Stakes Character, or Antagonist.**

In E.T. we meet the victim first, E.T. and the aliens; it's the same thing with JAWS, though it's coupled with meeting the antagonist at the same time. In FORREST GUMP, we meet the hero first. In STAR WARS, we meet the antagonist first.

The hero is usually introduced in his native setting. Forrest Gump is sitting on a bench, waiting for life to happen around him. In THE LION KING we meet Simba, safe and revered by all the animals in his parents care. In BEVERLY HILLS COP, Axel Foley is in Detroit, causing mischief.

If you introduce the victim(s) first, it's usually right before the moment of their victimization.

- In STAR WARS, Princess Leia's ship is as it's being fired on by the massive Star Destroyer.
- In ARMAGEDDON, astronauts are on a space walk which lasts only a few moments before meteorites destroy them and their space shuttle before pounding New York.
- In JAWS, the story opens with the kids on the beach right before Chrissie goes for her ill-fated swim.

Many films lump meeting the antagonist with meeting the victims for the obvious reason of victims need someone to make them victims and antagonists need someone to antagonize. We meet the antagonist first in Jurassic Park, which opens with a worker getting killed by a Raptor.

## Plot Point 2

### **We see the Hero's flaw in relation to the Stakes Character.**

The *stakes character* is the face that represents all of the people that the bad guys are victimizing. It's usually someone the hero feels very deeply about.

- In DIE HARD, Bruce Willis is trying to save the hostages, but the stakes character is his wife.
- In STAR WARS, Luke is trying to destroy the Death Star and save the rebel base, but the stakes character is actually Princess Leia.

In this plot point, we see what's wrong with the hero's life via the life of the stakes character. The stakes character usually has the qualities that the hero needs to complete his arc.

- In STAR WARS, Luke is stuck on Uncle Owen's farm, milking space cows and fixing fences when he really wants to go the academy, shoot some Stormtroopers and have great adventures. Leia is the stakes character; she's doing everything Luke dreams of doing, out in space, blasting Stormtroopers. Through her, we see Luke's flaw -- he's stuck on the farm -- even though we have yet to meet him.
- In DIE HARD, John McClane is a New York cop who gets no respect, while his wife, Holly, is respected by everyone. We learn John's flaw through her.
- In E.T., Elliot's family has been abandoned by Elliot's father, however Elliot's response has become inwardly focused. He has no real connection to his brother and sister, nor his mother, as is shown by his insensitive comment to her about Dad having run off with another woman.

## Plot Point 3

### **Antagonist or someone or something symbolic of the Antagonist.**

We finally meet our bad guy, or at least his representative. Sometimes it's a moment in the film that is representative of what the bad guy is trying to accomplish.

- In STAR WARS, Leia is captured by the Stormtroopers who are representatives of the Emperor.
- In AMERICAN BEAUTY, Lester dumps the contents of his briefcase while his wife and daughter stare at him as if he's the biggest loser on the planet.
- In THE SIXTH SENSE, Dr. Crowe is shot by his deranged former patient.

## Plot Point 4

### **The deflector slows the hero down. Pulls him off the path.**

The deflector is a character who deflects the Hero from the goal. He's the character who might want the hero to do things his way, rather than let the hero do it his way. He might be an otherwise good guy, only misguided. He might be a bad guy. There might be many "assistant" deflectors in a film. Anyone who gets in your hero's face and tries to stop him is a deflector.

- In STAR WARS, Darth Vader is the main deflector. The Jawas, the Sand People, the Stormtroopers, the goons in the bar. . . these are "assistant" deflectors.
- In JAWS, Quint is the main deflector while the Amity city officials are the assistant deflectors.
- In DIE HARD, Hans Gruber is the antagonist and the long-haired, high-kicking Karl is the main deflector. Almost everyone else are assistant deflectors including the other terrorists, the cops who want McClane to stop interfering, the FBI agents, and the smarmy Ellis.

Plot point 4 can be given to either the main deflector or any assistant deflector of your choosing.



## Plot Point 5

### **Inciting Event. Hero now gets emotionally involved.**

The hero starts getting tugged out of his ordinary world by an emotional connection to the adventure at hand. If it's not the Hero who gets emotionally involved, it's the audience getting involved on the Hero's behalf.

- In STAR WARS, Luke sees the hologram of the Princess inspiring him to ask C3PO "Who is she?"
- In LIAR LIAR, unknown to Fletcher, his ex-wife has just been proposed to, beginning the threat that he will lose contact with his son.
- In THE SIXTH SENSE, Dr. Crowe meets Cole and notices the scratches on Cole's wrists.

## Plot Point 6

### **Hero's goal as it relates to the Stakes Character and/or love interest. The Hero's problem is made clear to audience.**

This is often a clarifying beat that shows or foreshadows either the Hero's connection to or problem with the character with whom he has, will have, or wants to have the deepest personal connection.

- In TITANIC, we meet Rose and begin to understand her reluctant engagement to Cal.
- In THE INCREDIBLES, Bob is unfulfilled with his normal day job (not a Super Hero) and is not engaged with his family life.

This plot point often hovers a famous and overused line of dialog. It usually comes from the best friend who looks the Hero in the eye and says "Do you know what your problem is. . . ?" The best friend then lays out exactly what the Hero is going to need to learn to complete his arc by the end of the film. This plot point specifies in no uncertain terms the emotional journey your Hero must embark on to become whole.

## Plot Point 7

### **Ally (either true or unintentional) aids Hero by propelling him out of the status quo.**

There are two things that drive your Hero: his wants and his needs. Sometimes it's the same thing. Usually, they're different, but related in that the Hero often gets what he *wants* only by first getting what he *needs*.

- In LIAR LIAR, Fletcher *wants* to be with his son, Max, but what he *needs* is to learn how to be a good father, specifically by not continuing to lie to Max and breaking his heart. Only by being able to tell the truth without being controlled by the birthday wish that Max put on him (that he can't lie for 24 hours) is Fletcher able to grab the love of his son from the clutches of separation.

Plot Point 7 brings into the Hero's story an ally who is going to help move the hero along the path towards achieving either the specific goal of what the Hero wants, or more often than not, what the Hero needs by breaking the status quo of the Hero's world.

Sometimes these allies are true allies like Ron and Hermione in Harry Potter. Sometimes they grow to become true allies, such as R2D2. Sometimes they are anonymous characters who move into the story, serve the ally-function of the plot point, and disappear.

- In STAR WARS, R2D2 runs off to find Obi-Wan and Luke is forced to track him down. The end result of R2's running off? Because Luke left to find R2, he wasn't on the family farm when the Stormtroopers arrived looking for the droids, sparing him from the same death as his aunt and uncle. R2 was on his own agenda, wasn't trying to help Luke, but in the end R2 has inadvertently saved Luke's life and started him on the path of becoming a Jedi, saving the Princess, and destroying the Death Star.
- In AMERICAN BEAUTY, Lester tries to talk with Jane, who busts him for trying to become friends with her this late in the game. This conversation is the beginning of Lester's resolve to get back in touch with his lost youth and love of life. Jane is an unwitting ally, as is. . .
- . . . the Swede at the beginning of TITANIC who, by losing his ticket to Jack Dawson in a game of cards, starts Jack on a journey that will change his and Rose's lives.

In all three of these cases are heroes who were living through their everyday existence and through the unsolicited help of an ally, they are pushed out of their complacency and into the start of the extraordinary. .

## **Plot Point 8**

### **The Hero seems ready to move forward toward goal and/or Stakes Character, but can't.**

Now that an ally has moved the Hero towards his goal, the Hero must decide whether to remain bound by his ordinary life or go for something bigger. Often the Hero is a Reluctant Hero and needs some prodding.

Nowhere is this more true than on the personal level. To change the course of one's life is difficult;. Often, when the opportunity is presented, the heart says "yes", while the mind starts raising all sorts of very reasonable objections. In the classic mythic structure this is the Call to Adventure/Refusal of the Call.

- In TITANIC, Jack sees Rose for the first time but doesn't dare go after her. He's an itinerant artist traveling in steerage, she's a rich girl in first class.
- In STAR WARS, Luke is asked to by Obi-Wan to join him in his quest to save the Princess and become a Jedi, but Luke can't leave the farm with all the work that needs doing.
- In LIAR, LIAR, Fletcher wants to take his son to wrestling, but the big case is dropped into his lap that can make him partner and he has to prepare for the trial.

## **Plot Point 9**

### **The Antagonist or Deflector conflict stops the Hero or threatens emotional stakes.**

Whatever or whoever has been lurking in the background starts moving into the foreground of the Hero's world.

- In STAR WARS, the Jawas are found dead and it's deduced to be the work of Stormtroopers.
- In THE SIXTH SENSE, Tommy, who has been acting the part of Cole's friend, walks him to school and calls him a "freak."
- In LIAR, LIAR, Fletcher wants to get back in time for Max's birthday but he is seduced by Miranda.

## **Plot Point 10**

### **The depth of feeling between the Hero and the Stakes Character or the severity of the threat to the Victims is brought out.**

In Act I it's important to reinforce a few things, and one of those are the stakes. The reader should know who the main character is, who the antagonist is, and who is at stake. All that's missing is that final acceptance on the part of the Hero. The purpose of Plot Point 10 is to make sure that the stakes are very clear.

- In STAR WARS, Luke sees his aunt and uncle have been murdered (severity of threat).
- In THE SIXTH SENSE, Cole stands outside his school, too afraid to go inside (severity of threat).
- In LIAR, LIAR, although it's his birthday, Max can't enjoy himself without Fletcher being there (depth of feeling).

## **Plot Point 11**

### **The Deflector or Antagonist threatens to take the Stakes Character from the Hero.**

This is a beat which the Hero may or may not be aware of as it's happening.

- In STAR WARS, this beat is the start of the interrogation scene where Darth Vader enters the Princess's cell with his nasty floating droid. Luke is unaware that this is going on, has no connection yet with the Princess outside of knowing her situation, but the scene serves to make the audience anxious for Luke to start being heroic and go save her.
- In a similar vein in LIAR, LIAR, Fletcher starts his descent into honesty hell in earnest, being completely compelled to tell the truth in every situation. The end result of this is a conversation with his ex-wife where he tells the truth about why he didn't come to Max's party. This admission is enough to make his ex-wife talk to Max about moving away.

## **Plot Point 12**

### **The Hero decides that he must act to save the Stakes Character**

This is it. . . the call to adventure can no longer be refused. The Hero is forced out of complacency and must start looking to create a new equilibrium in his life. His life cannot be the same from this point forward.

- In STAR WARS, Luke returns to Obi-Wan and tells him that he wants to go to Alderaan and learn the ways of the force like his father.
- In AMERICAN BEAUTY, Lester sees Angela performing at the half-time show and is transfixed.
- In THE SIXTH SENSE, Dr. Crowe tells his wife of the similarities between Cole and the suicidal patient, Vincent, saying that if he can save Cole, he can somehow make up for failing Vincent.

## The Central Question

Now, it's time to not only create the Central Question, which we know once it's answered, our story is over.

Examples of the Central Question from popular films include:

“Will Sheriff Brody kill the shark, get over his fear of water, and gain the respect of the people of Amity island?” (JAWS)

“Will Tracy Turnblad overcome her weight problem, end up with Link Larkin, and win Miss Hairspray?” (HAIRSPRAY)

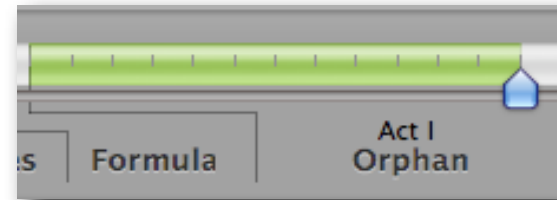
In short, your Hero now knows what he must accomplish, who is trying to stop him, and what waits for him or the stakes character if he fails.

It's important to note that a solid Central Question should include three components, covering the protagonist's Professional, Personal, and Private areas of conflict.

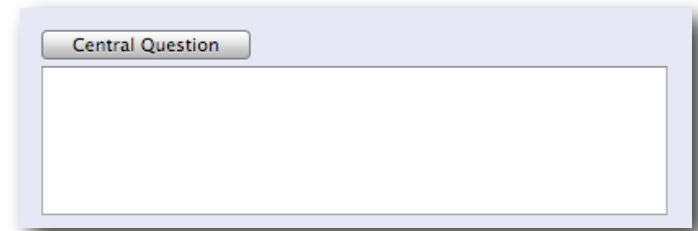
To answer the Central Question:

- 1 Click on the slider and drag it over to the last tick in the Act I Orphan area
- 2 Enter your Central Question.

1



2



## Chapter 8: Act II Structure

**N**ow that Act I is done, your protagonist's journey really kicks into high gear, but it's at this point where most writers don't know where to go, and they freeze up.

As previously mentioned, what comes after the Central Question are 28 plot points; 14 in the first half of Act II to make up the Wanderer beats and 14 in the second half of Act II to make up the Warrior beats.

The nature of these 28 plot points is to:

**Alternate bringing the hero closer and then farther away from answering the Central Question. First "yes" and then "no."**

These are called "yes/no reversals."

Any situation that brings your main character closer to his goal is a "yes." Anything that threatens to take him further away is a "no." Road blocks go up, and the protagonist finds a way over, around, under, or through them. An even larger one looms on the horizon, and the protagonist dispatches that one as well.

Just remember: In both halves of Act II, there are 14 "Yes" plot points and 14 "No" plot points each.

### In This Chapter:

The First Half of Act II

Developing the First Half of Act II in Contour

The Second Half of Act II

Developing the Second Half of Act II in Contour

## The First Half of Act II

Act I of STAR WARS ends with Luke joining Obi-Wan on his quest to deliver the Death Star plans to the Rebel Alliance, save the Princess and become trained in the arts of the Jedi Knight. Starting with our Central Question -- *Will Luke become a Jedi, save the Princess and destroy the Death Star?*-- lets look at the plot points in the first half of Act II:

### **Will Luke become a Jedi, save the Princess and destroy the Death Star?**

*YES HE WILL* - He goes to Mos Eisley with Obi Wan and the droids. He's on the way to becoming a Jedi! He's going to save the Princess! He's going to blow up the Death Star! Only. . .

*NO HE WON'T* - They are stopped by Stormtroopers. They're going to get caught. He's failed the Central Question. It's over. Only. . .

*YES HE WILL* - Obi Wan uses the Force and they get past. He's going to become a Jedi! He's going to save the Princess! He's gonna blow up the Death Star! Only. . .

*NO HE WON'T* - They go to the bar and Luke is attacked. He's failed again. Only. . .

*YES HE WILL* - Obi Wan Saves him, they find Han Solo and make a deal to leave.

*NO HE WON'T* - Han is stopped by Greedo who wants to kill him. Disaster! Only. . .

*YES HE WILL* - Han kills Greedo. Luke sells his speeder and they have enough money for the moment. He's going to become a Jedi! He's going to save the Princess! He's going to blow up the Death Star! Only. . .

Back and forth -- push and pull -- give and take -- for every action, there is an opposite. . .you get the idea.



## Developing the First Half of Act II in Contour

Keeping in mind the fact that your protagonist is now a Wanderer, gaining knowledge, making friends and allies, and for every positive step he takes in moving closer to the Central Question, he'll meet resistance, let's develop the first half of Act II.

- 1 Click on the title in the Screenplay Title pane.
- 2 Click on the slider and move it to the first tick in the Act II/ Wanderer section.
- 3 Click inside the first "Yes" field and enter your scene ideas and/or beats for your first "Yes." (see next page)
- 4 Click on the slider and move it to the second tick in the Act II/ Wanderer section.
- 5 Click inside the first "No" field and enter your scene which will serve to move your protagonist further away from answering the Central Question. (see next page)
- 6 Click on the slider and move it to the next tick in the Act II/ Wanderer section. (see next page)
- 7 Continue adding "Yes" and "No" plot points until you reach the mid-point of Act II, where the Wanderer will morph into the Warrior.

2

Act II  
Wanderer

3

5

Yes 1	
No 1	Yes - Show your hero as a wanderer picking up skills and tools he thinks he needs to answer the Central Question. This point should bring them closer to answering the Central Question
Yes 2	
No 2	
Yes 3	

That takes us to the end of the first half of Act II. It's simple and complex at the same time; there are certain things that have to be kept in mind, such as creating interesting situations, creating intriguing characters, and creating increasingly difficult obstacles. However, once you understand the simple mechanics of the yes/no reversals of Act II, you will have a leg up on the writing process.

Michael Hauge, in his excellent book *Writing Screenplays That Sell* gives excellent insight when it comes to story:

Your story must “enable a sympathetic character to overcome a series of increasingly difficult, seemingly insurmountable obstacles and achieve a compelling desire.”

If you notice, Mr. Hauge didn't say:

*“enable a character to overcome obstacles in order to achieve a desire”;*

he said that the character is a “sympathetic” character.

The obstacles are:

“increasingly difficult, seemingly insurmountable.”

The desire is:

“compelling.”

## **The Second Half of Act II**

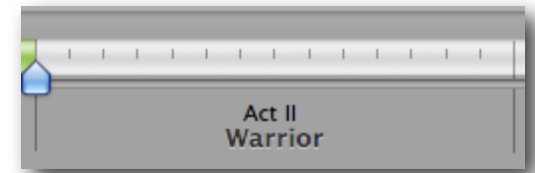
By mid-point in Act II, your protagonist learns all that they need to learn, or they simply run out of time and must act decisively. It's at this point, your Wanderer morphs into a Warrior. We've previously discussed what happens by the end of Act II, and that's where the protagonist reaches "the lowest of the lows", having lost it all. They experience death in some way, shape, or form -- only to be "reborn".

## Developing the Second Half of Act II in Contour

Keeping in mind the fact that your protagonist is now a Warrior, and that the severity of his opposition grows by leaps and bounds until “all is lost” as he struggles to move closer to the Central Question, let’s develop the first half of Act II.

- 1 Click on the slider and move it to the first tick in the Act II/ Warrior section.
- 2 Click inside the first “Yes” field and enter your scene ideas and/or beats for your first “Yes.”
- 3 Press tab to move to the next text field.
- 4 Click inside the first “No” field and enter your scene which will serve to move your protagonist further away from answering the Central Question. (*see next page*)

2



- 5 Press tab to move to the next text field and continue adding “Yes” and “No” plot points until you reach the end of Act II, where the Warrior will experience his “death”.

3

Yes 8 This is the first "Yes" scene for our Warrior.

No 8

Yes 9

No 9

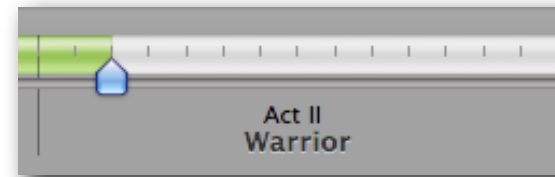
Yes 10

5

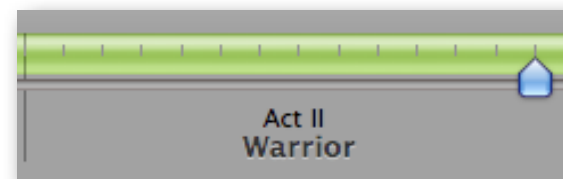
4



6



7



## Chapter 9: Act III Structure

**A**ct III, the Martyr phase of the hero's journey, consists of four plot points -- two yesses and two no's -- but their order is a little different from the reversals in Act II and perfectly suited to help close out the action of your story.

### In This Chapter:

Act III Plot Point Overview

Developing Act III in Contour

## Act III Plot Point Overview

The last four plot points, in order, are BIG YES, NO, BIG NO, FINAL YES.

**BIG YES** - The Hero has achieved a substantial victory.

George McFly defeats Biff in BACK TO THE FUTURE.

In JAWS, Brody, Quint and Hooper head back to the shallows to lure the shark, who's traveling with three barrels

Rose has finally made it onto a lifeboat and is being lowered towards the water in TITANIC. And then.

..

**NO** - The Hero suffers a setback; it's not fatal, but it's really, really bad:

In TITANIC, Rose jumps out of the lifeboat because she won't leave Jack behind.

In JAWS, the boat blows its engine.

In BACK TO THE FUTURE, Marty tries to give Emmett a note about the future that will save his life (saving Emmett's life is one of Marty's goals); however, Emmett rips the note up.

**BIG NO** - things go from really bad to much worse. . . disaster. . . failure. The situation is hopeless.

The TITANIC is breaking apart and Jack and Rose are being chased by a murderous Cal Hockley. They get away from him and now ride the Titanic down into the water.

Marty finally makes it BACK TO THE FUTURE after much difficulty only to arrive a few moments too late to save Emmett.

The shark has seemingly killed Hooper, has eaten Quint and has wrecked the boat which is sinking fast.

**What will our heroes do?**

**FINAL YES** - Pulling success from the jaws of failure, the Hero achieves his main goal, although sometimes the goal can be quite different from what the Hero first set out to achieve. In these cases, the Hero gets what he really needs, rather than what he thought he wanted. And sometimes the yes is bittersweet.

Brody grabs his rifle in *JAWS*, climbs the mast of the sinking Orca, and shoots the compressed air tank the shark is chomping on.

In *TITANIC*, Jack succeeds in saving Rose's life, but at the cost of his own.



## Developing Act III in Contour

Keeping in mind the fact that your protagonist is now a Martyr, and it seems that the Central Question is more elusive than ever, let's develop Act III.

- 1 Click on the title in the Screenplay Title pane.
- 2 Click on the slider and move it to the first tick in the Act III/ Martyr section.
- 3 Click inside the “ Big Yes” field and enter your scene ideas and/or beats for your first “Big Yes.”
- 4 Press tab to move to the next text box (the first “No” field) and enter your scene which will serve as the first “No”.
- 6 Click on the slider and move it to the next tick in the Act III/Martyr section.
- 7 Finish the last “Big No” and the final “Big Yes” where your Martyr becomes victorious.

3

The screenshot shows a software interface with four text input fields, each with a label button to its left. The fields contain the following text:

- Label: **Big Yes** | Text: This is the first Big Yes.
- Label: **No** | Text: This is the first No.
- Label: **Big No** | Text: This is a really big No|
- Label: **Final Yes** | Text: And this is the Final Yes. The Central Question IS answered!

A vertical scrollbar is visible on the right side of the interface.

5

7

## Chapter 10: Landmarks

**N**ow that we've established the plot points for Acts I, II, and III, we can now turn our attention toward fleshing out our outline even more with the use of the Guide

The guide is a window that helps you incorporate your plot points into a solid treatment. Mnemonic sayings help you remember what goes where and why. "Belly of the Whale", "...Make Lemonade", and "Kick the Dog" will all soon make sense to you. Read on for enlightenment.

**In This Chapter:**

About Landmarks

## About Landmarks

“Landmarks” in a story are like geographical landmarks; they provide you with familiar features on your journey so you know where you are and -- if you’re lucky -- where you’re going.

In a story, character/plot/theme landmarks make the audience willing traveling companions because these are the moments that all good stories have in common. Just as no journey to Washington D.C., or New York, or London is complete without seeing certain landmarks, the same is true in regards to a story’s journey as well. The trip for the audience just isn’t complete unless they see certain things.

Unlike the 12 Plot Points of Act I which are very specific, landmarks happen in certain regions of all stories, and not necessarily in a particular order.

Revisiting the Development Paradigm, we will now make 12 distinct groupings of plot points:

<b>ACT I</b>	<b>ACT II</b>		<b>ACT III</b>
Orphan	Wanderer	Warrior	Martyr
Plot Points 1-3: Plot Points 4-5 Plot Points 6-8 Plot Points 9-12	Yes/No 1-3 Yes/No 4-5 Yes/No 6-7	Yes/No 8-10 Yes/No 11-12 Yes/No 13-14	Big Yes - No Big No - Final Yes

### **ACT 1 -- 12 PLOT POINTS 1 THROUGH 3**

In these first three plot points of Act I, known as “I Don’t Get No Respect” in the Guide, several landmarks occur, including:

The theme of the film will have been stated either explicitly or implicitly, either through action or a visual. Think of the opening to GLADIATOR with Maximus running his hands over the tall grass. This is a statement of the theme “There’s no place like home.”

The hero is established in his/her ordinary world as the “greatest” or “most” something. It could even be a negative. When we meet him, Woody is the greatest friend a kid could ever have; Harry Potter, when we meet him he is the most disadvantaged foster child we’ve ever met without crossing the line to being legally abused. Luke is the most ordinary farm boy in the universe.

The hero has limited awareness of which aspect of him/her is “broken.” This is often associated with a “ghost” from the hero’s past; a major and unresolved crisis that is coming to a head and can no longer be ignored.

Between these landmarks and the rest of Act I, the audience should start becoming aware of the hero’s three areas of conflict; professional, personal, and private:

### **ACT 1 -- 12 PLOT POINTS 4 THROUGH 5**

In these next two plot points of Act I, known in the Guide as “You Know What Your Trouble Is?”, several landmarks occur, including:

The inciting incident will occur. This will lead to. . .

The hero has an increased awareness of his/her needs.

The stakes are made clear. This is what the hero stands to lose.

The proverbial call to adventure occurs or is alluded to. The hero is summoned or made aware that he/she may need to leave the ordinary world but either doesn’t acknowledge or refuses to answer the call. . . yet.

## **ACT 1 -- 12 PLOT POINTS 6 THROUGH 8**

In these next three plot points of Act I, known as “Calls and Busy Signals” in the Guide, several landmarks should occur:

The hero is hassled and or reminded about his/her major point of “brokenness.” Often it’s in the form of a question from an ally: *“Why don’t you think about how someone else feels for a change?”*

The hero’s orphan status is amplified.

The theme is amplified.

The call to adventure is now clearly stated to the hero. *“You must come with me to Alderaan if you are to be a Jedi like your father.”*

The refusal of the call is made. *“I can’t go to Alderaan. . . I’ve got to milk the space-cows.”*

## **ACT 1 -- 12 PLOT POINTS 9 THROUGH 12**

In these last four plot points of Act I, known as “Through the Looking Glass” in the Guide, several landmarks should occur:

The intensity of the threat to the hero and/or the stakes character(s) is made clear.

The hero can no longer ponder what the proper course of action is and must take action. This is the acceptance of the call to adventure.

The three areas of conflict -- professional, personal, and private -- are clearly brought into focus and stated.

The Central Question of the film is raised. Ideally, the Central Question should include the three areas of conflict:

Will Luke become a Jedi (by trusting the Force - PRIVATE), save the Princess (PERSONAL) and destroy the Death Star (PROFESSIONAL)?

Will Fletcher learn how not to lie (PRIVATE), stop Max from going to Boston (PROFESSIONAL) and learn how to become a good father (PERSONAL)?

Will Lester Get Angela (PROFESSIONAL), reclaim his youth (PERSONAL) and passion for living (PRIVATE)?

## **Act II -- 14 YES-NOs 1 THROUGH 3**

In these first three pairs of reversals of Act II, known as “Kick the Dog” in the Guide pane, several landmarks occur:

The hero gets help from allies and aides, often in the form of a mentor character.

The villain will be established as being not just bad but really bad. In the absence of a standard villain (such as in a romantic comedy), the opposition to the hero’s goal will be shown to be a very strong opposition.

The hero begins the learning process, actively pursuing what he or she thinks is needed to resolve the Central Question while getting an insight into what will *really* be needed to resolve the Central Question. Generally, the hero will either be oblivious or deny the validity of this insight.

The hero will meet with low-level opposition which he or she will struggle to barely overcome. These can be considered “training exercises” or “dry runs” for the skills and/or insights that the hero will really need.

The love story, comedic runner, or secondary story will begin in earnest.

## **Act II -- 14 YES-NOs 4 THROUGH 5**

In these next two pairs of reversals of Act II, known as “Which Way is Up” in the Guide pane, several landmarks occur:

The hero continues to wander, learning with greater clarity what he or she needs to do to resolve the Central Question while testing the waters with his or nascent abilities.

The obstacles increase in intensity.

The opposition to the hero becomes aware of the hero’s existence (if the opposition wasn’t already).

## **Act II -- 14 YES-NOs 6 THROUGH 7**

In these next 2 pairs of reversals of Act II, known as “When Life Gives You Lemons. . .” in the Guide Pane, several landmarks occur:

The threat to the stakes character increases to the point of Life or Death (literal or figurative.)

The third act solution is shown, though the significance of it is likely lost on the hero at this time.

The opposite value of the theme is clearly stated (*“Hokey religions are no substitute for a good blaster, kid.”*)

The hero knows all of the rules (or thinks he/she does) and wandering further will not help the hero to learn more.

The villain’s plan is explained either to the hero, by the hero, or to others.

Time to fight, to enter the villain’s world, or the world in which the villain will be encountered.

## **Act II -- 14 YES-NOs 8 THROUGH 10**

In these next three pairs of reversals of second half of Act II, known as “. . .make Lemonade” in the Guide Pane, several landmarks occur:

The hero will have shifted into action, making decisions (for better or worse) in the now active and direct attempt to resolved the Central Question.

The hero will meet with some initial success.

The villain/opposing force will tighten the screws on the hero’s goal.

The thematic question will be raised and heightened, often with one character expressing the pro argument of the theme while a different character expresses the opposing thematic argument. The hero will bounce between both viewpoints.

Possibly unknowingly, the hero will prepare for his or her big change.

## **Act II -- 14 YES-NOs 11 THROUGH 12**

In these next two pairs of reversals of Act II, known as “Inside the Whale” in the Guide Pane, several landmarks occur:

Intense, direct conflict between the hero and the opposing force/villain.

Hero realizes that he or she still lacks the skills needed to succeed.

The hero enters his or her darkest internal space, often physically expressed by a tight, enclosed place.

The hero undergoes the Ultimate Test leading to a death-moment.

## **Act II -- 14 YES-NOs 13 THROUGH 14**

In these final TWO pairs of reversals of Act II, known as “Death and Rebirth” in the Guide Pane, several landmarks occur:

The hero emerges from the death-moment (resurrection) a new being, more fully actualized, with a new understanding, but not quite ready for the final challenge yet. *(Note: Sometimes this happens in the next Landmark section)*

Whatever answers the question “What’s the worst that can happen?”, happens. The villain gains the ultimate upper hand.

The boat breaks down and Brody is stranded on the water without even a radio. (JAWS)

Obi Wan is killed and the Death Star is led to the rebel base. (STAR WARS)

Woody is abandoned by his friends in the house of Sid, the psycho toy-mutilator. (TOY STORY)

The hero assumes the role of standard-bearer for the positive expression of the thematic argument:

Obi Wan is killed, leaving Luke the defender of the Force. (STAR WARS)

Max is going to be taken away and Fletcher embraces telling the truth (LIAR, LIAR)

Cole admits that ghosts want help (THE SIXTH SENSE)



The hero is at his or her lowest moment, which can be expressed through a character interlude.

### **Act III -- BIG YES - NO**

In this first pair of reversals of Act III, also known as “What’s the Worst that Can Happen” in the Guide Pane, several landmarks occur:

The hero, having embraced the positive thematic argument, makes a commitment to change. This sets up the resolution to the Private Conflict.

Energized by this private (and usually unstated) commitment, the hero understands the need to be willing to sacrifice himself or herself for the benefit of the stakes character. This sets up the resolution to the Personal Conflict.

The hero acts out of courage and does the gutsiest thing possible. This sets up the resolution to the Professional Conflict.

The hero meets with failure, but instead of licking his or her wounds, the hero presses on.

### **Act III -- BIG NO - FINAL YES**

In this last pair of reversals of Act III, known as “Good Guy vs, Bad Guy over Stakes” in the Guide Pane, several landmarks occur:

The **Central Question** is on the brink of being answered to the negative.

The hero (and indeed, many of the hero’s allies) make **a huge sacrifice**.

Hooper goes into the shark cage, Brody goes into the water to face the shark. (JAWS)

Luke switches off his targeting computer, the Princess stays on the planet, Han comes back.(STAR WARS)

If a Third Act Solution was shown earlier, it is brought into play as the device which is needed by the hero to triumph.

Brody knows that the compressed air tank can explode. (JAWS)

Nemo knows that the drain pipe leads to the bay. (FINDING NEMO)

The hero comes to terms with and resolves his or her Private Conflict, which in turn empowers the hero to resolve his or her Personal Conflict, which in turn enables the hero to resolve his or her Professional Conflict.

(Note: One can be a bit flexible about the order in which these three conflicts resolve. That being said, the closer together in the story these resolutions come, the more satisfying the conclusion of the story. And if you can answer all three at the same time, so much the better.)

A short denouement scene to wrap up the story which shows the hero now fully actualized, returned to his Ordinary World, and both having embraced and embodying the positive values of the thematic question.

## Chapter 11: The Guide

Sometimes it's easier to think of your story in bigger moments and then work your way down into the nitty-gritty. Contour knows this and provides the Guide as an alternate way of looking at your story.

The Guide is a series of 12 sequential text boxes, each with its own memorable title. These titles are actually defining statements that represent what the general tone of your script should be as your story unfolds.

Even though each text box is linked to a specific plot point in the main part of Contour, each text box actually represents a range of pages (1-6, 6-12, etc.) For example, the very first text box in the Guide is titled I Don't Get No Respect. Between pages 1-6 of most screenplays, the main character is almost never shown any respect. The information you enter in this first text box will automatically link back to Plot Point 3 in Act I because by the end of Plot Point 3 we should have seen that your main character is disrespected.

### In This Chapter:

Using the Guide

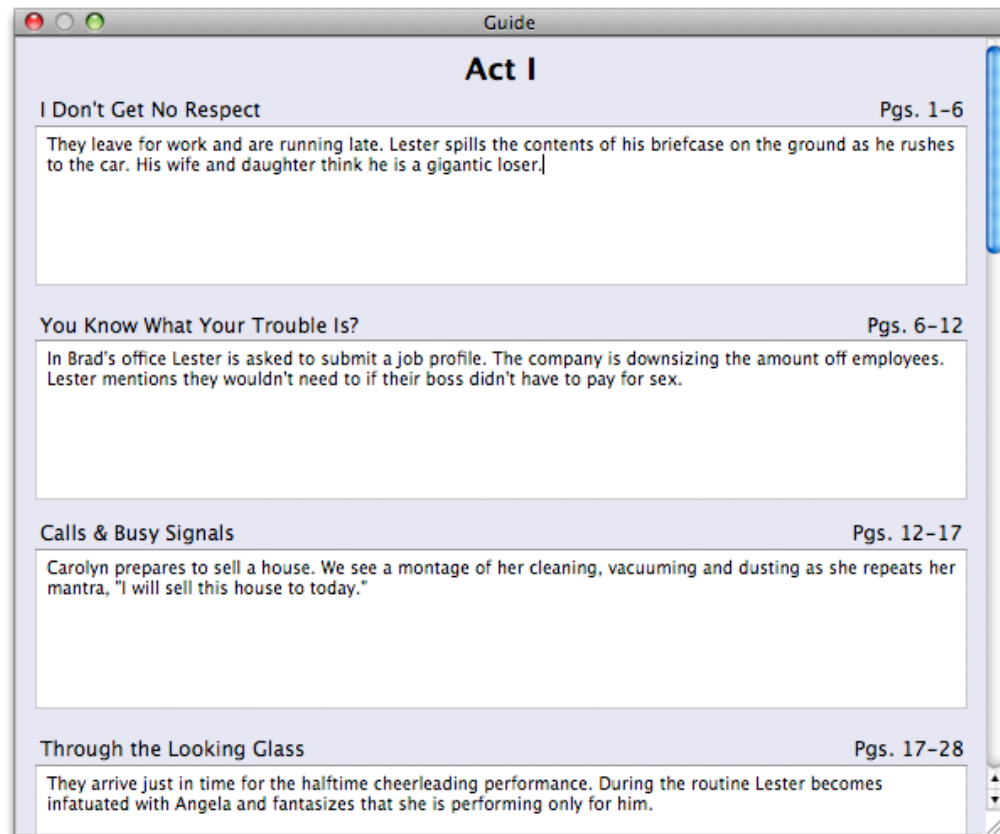
Accessing the Guide

Mnemonic Sayings

## Using the Guide

The Guide works as either something you can fill in to broadstroke your story, or something you refer to as you fill in the Plot Points in Contour to make sure the tone of the Plot Points matches professional story structure. Of course, you can flip back and forth between the Guide and the Plot Points. The Guide is designed to be both another tool to jar your story ideas loose and get them on paper as well as an easy way to shorthand the major moments of your story.

If you have the full scope of the story in mind, we highly recommend using the Guide first. By filling in the 12 text boxes of the Guide and then jumping back to the Plot Points of Contour, you'll find that you'll have literally 25% of your Plot Points finished before you even get started!

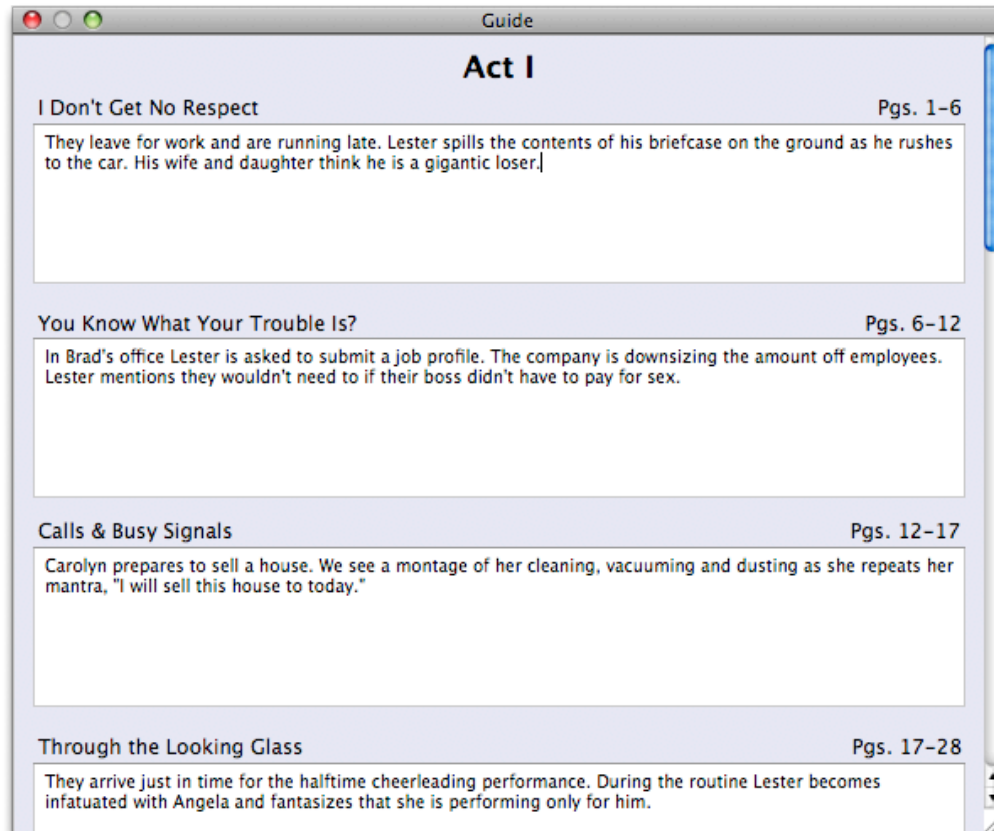


## Accessing the Guide

The Guide is a display of your plot points, the page numbers they will approximately fall on, and a saying that will point you towards what is going on in that area.

- 1 Choose your Screenplay from the Title pane.
- 2 Click on the Guide button.

The Guide Window Appears



## Mnemonic Sayings

<b>Approx. Pages</b>	<b>Mnemonic Guide</b>
1 - 6	I Don't Get No Respect
6 - 12	You Know What Your Trouble Is?
12 - 17	Calls And Busy Signals
17 - 28	Through The Looking Glass
28 - 35	Kick The Dog
35 - 45	Which Way Is Up?
45 - 55	When Life Gives You Lemons...
55 - 65	...Make Lemonade
65 - 75	Inside The Whale
75 - 85	Death & Rebirth
85 - 95	What's The Worst That Can Happen?
95 - 105	Good Guy Vs. Bad Guy Over Stakes

What follows is a description of each mnemonic saying, what it means, and examples from films.

## I DON'T GET NO RESPECT

Most screenplays are about one thing...respect! Your protagonist doesn't have it, knows he doesn't have it, and wants it. In this first section make it clear to the reader that your main character is an orphan; an outsider looking in at world that doesn't want him.

Shrek is being hunted by the townspeople who hate ogres. (SHREK)

Elliot is ignored and disrespected by his brother and his brother's friends (E.T. – THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL)

Peter Parker is a slight, nerdy high school kid. (SPIDER-MAN)

## YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR TROUBLE IS?

Make the protagonist's problem or flaw clear both to the protagonist and the reader. When in doubt, you may use the (overused) line of dialog that goes "You know what your problem is?" uttered by the protagonist's ally or best friend.

Luke wants to leave the farm early and join the academy, but his uncle tells him no. (STAR WARS)

Elliot is told that he needs to think about how other people feel. (E.T. – THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL)

Hooper arrives and determines that "this was no boating accident!" (JAWS)

## CALLS & BUSY SIGNALS

Give the protagonist the famous "call to adventure" which is followed by the equally famous "refusal of the call."

Jack sees Rose but doesn't dare go after her because of the difference in social status. (TITANIC)

Luke is told by Obi-Wan that he must learn how to be Jedi but Luke says he can't...he's got too much to do. (STAR WARS)

Fletcher wants to take his son to wrestling, but the big case is dropped in his lap and he chooses to prepare for the trial. (LIAR LIAR)

Sam gets the letter from Annie but refuses to answer it. (SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE)

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Force the protagonist out of the normal world and have him or her answer the "call to adventure." Sometimes the protagonist does this by choice, sometimes by circumstance.

Neo chooses to take the red pill. Or was it the blue pill? (THE MATRIX)

Luke's aunt and uncle are killed and now there's no reason for him to stay on Tatooine. (STAR WARS)

Will Turner joins with Jack Sparrow to pursue Elizabeth on the Black Pearl. (PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL)

## KICK THE DOG

Show that the bad guys are not just bad, but really, Really, REALLY bad. Give the protagonist (and the reader) the idea that answering the Central Question is going to be harder than the initially thought. If you don't have a standard antagonist (as in a love story) show that the obstacles to the protagonist are overwhelmingly strong.

The Deathstar destroys a whole planet. (STAR WARS)

Butch and Sundance begin to be pursued by the "super posse." (BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID)

Dr. Neville tries a new serum on a mutant and fails spectacularly. (I AM LEGEND)



## WHICH WAY IS UP?

Give the protagonist a series of successes and failures as he or she "wanders" and starts to master the skills needed to ultimately answer the Central Question.

Dr. Cole makes progress in getting Cole to tell him what his problem is. (THE SIXTH SENSE)

Kevin gets groceries, orders pizza, and starts defending his house. (HOME ALONE)

Jack starts conquering the class divide and begins his relationship with Rose. (TITANIC)

## WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS...

Just when your protagonist thought he or she was making progress, you pull the rug out from under! Force your protagonist to stop wandering and start fighting.

Batman realizes that trying to fight the Joker by the Joker's rules isn't going to work. (THE DARK KNIGHT)

Lester argues with Carolyn about their sex life. (AMERICAN BEAUTY)

Luke and company are pulled into the Deathstar and discover that the Leia is being held onboard. (STAR WARS)

## ...MAKE LEMONADE

Have your protagonist get into direct confrontation in a big way.

Tony Stark uses his suit to defend a village. (IRON MAN)

Luke starts gets Leia out of the the detention block and brings down the wrath of the Stormtroopers. (STAR WARS)

Brody's own son is almost attacked by the shark and he compels the Mayor to hire Quint. (JAWS)

## ...INSIDE THE WHALE

In classic mythological storytelling, this is the "belly of the beast" or the "inside the darkest cave" moment for the main character. Often the scene takes place in a confined space, representing that the forces at play against the protagonist are closing in...tightening...and the protagonist must dig "deep" and face his or her darkest fear.

Indiana Jones is abandoned inside the Well of Souls, surrounded by snakes. (RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK)

Luke goes into the cave and faces what he thinks is Darth Vader, but is actually a representation of the dark side of the force that is within him. (THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK)

Sam and gang are deep within Hoover Dam as Megatron is unfrozen. (TRANSFORMERS)

Kevin is forced to go into the basement and confront the very scary boiler. (HOME ALONE)

## DEATH & REBIRTH

Another classic moment. Have your main character seemingly die and then be reborn. In many ways this is the ultimate moment in the arc of your protagonist; the moment when he sheds the skin of his old life and emerges newly formed, self-actualized, and ready to prove himself to the world.

The death and rebirth can be massaged in a variety of ways, and you can sometimes hand it to the character most closely associated with your protagonist's highest aspirations. In romantic comedies, write this section so that it charts the death of the hoped-for relationship followed by the realization of what's needed to give it new hope.

Elliot is fading, and E.T. "disconnects" himself from Elliot. Elliot's vital signs improve and E.T. "dies." Once Elliot heartbreakingly admits how little he now feels, E.T. is resurrected with the return of the spaceship to take him home. (E.T.: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL)

Annie believes that Sam is involved in a serious relationship and is giving him up, only to be called to action by Jonah's letter asking her to meet at the Empire State Building. (SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE)

Bob jumps into the water and is presumed blown to bits. (THE INCREDIBLES)

## WHAT'S THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN?

The title says it all! Your protagonist's whole life (your whole story) has been built towards both avoiding this moment as well as confronting it. Avoiding, because it is his worst fear. Confronting because this is what he needs to do in order to become the person he needs to be.

Luke is out-gunned, out-numbered, and the Death Star is closing in on destroying the Rebel Base and killing Leia. (STAR WARS)

Jonah runs away and Sam frantically has to go to New York to find him. (SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE)

The ship is breaking up and Jack and Rose are being pursued by the murderous Cal. (TITANIC)

And lest we forget...the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man! (GHOSTBUSTERS)

## GOOD GUY VS. BAD GUY OVER STAKES

The climax of every well-told story is the protagonist in pitched battle against the antagonist over the stakes of the story. I've seen films where the final battle is handed to some subordinate or minor character, and you can feel your brain rebel while watching. In your story, make sure it is your main character who has to get his hands dirty, not someone else. Your main character might get some desperately needed help, but choices and action belong to your main character.

In romantic comedies, this can be a seemingly small moment right at the very end of the story, because after all, when boy gets girl it's all over.

Brody is on the sinking Orca and squares off against the shark to save Amity. ( JAWS)

Jack fights Barbossa to save Will and Elizabeth. (PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL)

Sam finds Jonah at the top of the Empire State building, almost misses Annie, but finds her when they come back to retrieve Jonah's backpack. (SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE)

Luke destroys the Deathstar and saves Leia. (STAR WARS)

## Chapter 12: The Idea Pane

Every screenplay, play, short story, or book begin as the glimmer of an idea, born in the imagination of the human mind. There, the big “What if” is asked:

“What if an alien from outer space was stranded on earth?”

“What if a young boy could see dead people?”

“What if we could be a fly on the wall in a beauty shop and hear what women really think when as they get their manicures?”

“What if the member of a high school basketball team found out he was a member of a family of werewolves?”

“What if a cruise ship was struck by a monstrous tidal wave and flipped over?”

Maybe an idea is inspired by a story in the newspaper, or on the internet. Maybe the idea comes from the lyrics of a song.

Regardless of the source, your needs to find a home before it disappears with the ring of a telephone, the sudden appearance of a iChat bubble, or any one of a million other distractions.

Giving your idea a home is the first step in the Contour process. What you do with that idea after that is up to you.

### In This Chapter:

Adding an Idea

Modifying an Idea

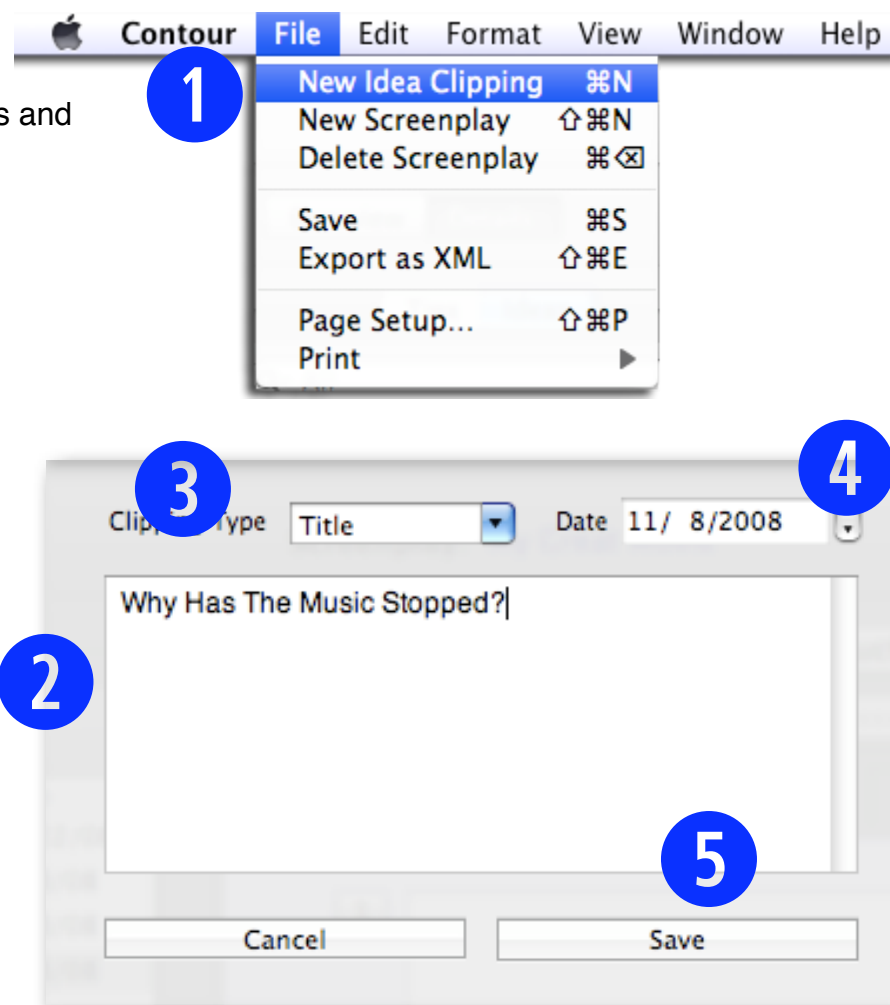
Removing an Idea

## Adding an Idea

The Idea Pane is a place to store ideas. Any idea that you add will appear no matter what screenplay you are currently working on. There are several different idea types and you can add your own.

To add an idea to the Idea Pane:

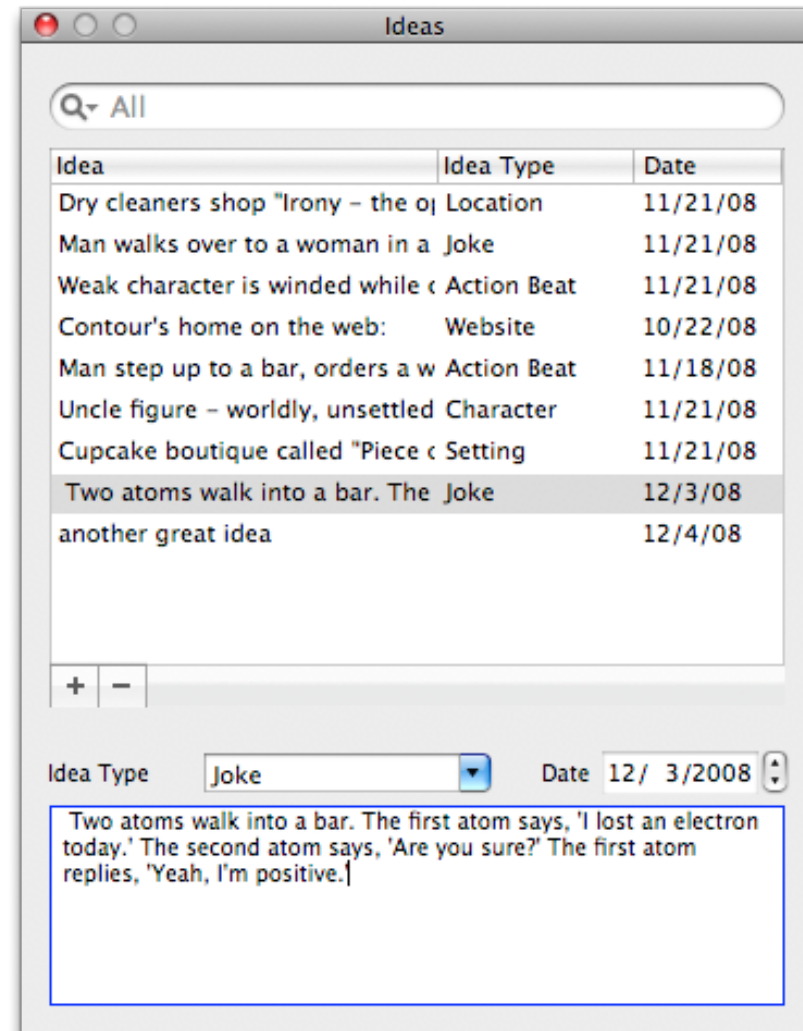
- 1 Choose File - New Idea or press Command - N
- 2 The idea sheet appears.
- 3 Select the idea type from the Idea Type menu.
- 4 Change the date if necessary.
- 5 Click on the Save button.



## Modifying an Idea

To modify an idea previously added to the Idea Pane:

- 1 Click on the Idea title
- 2 Click in the text area below and modify the text.



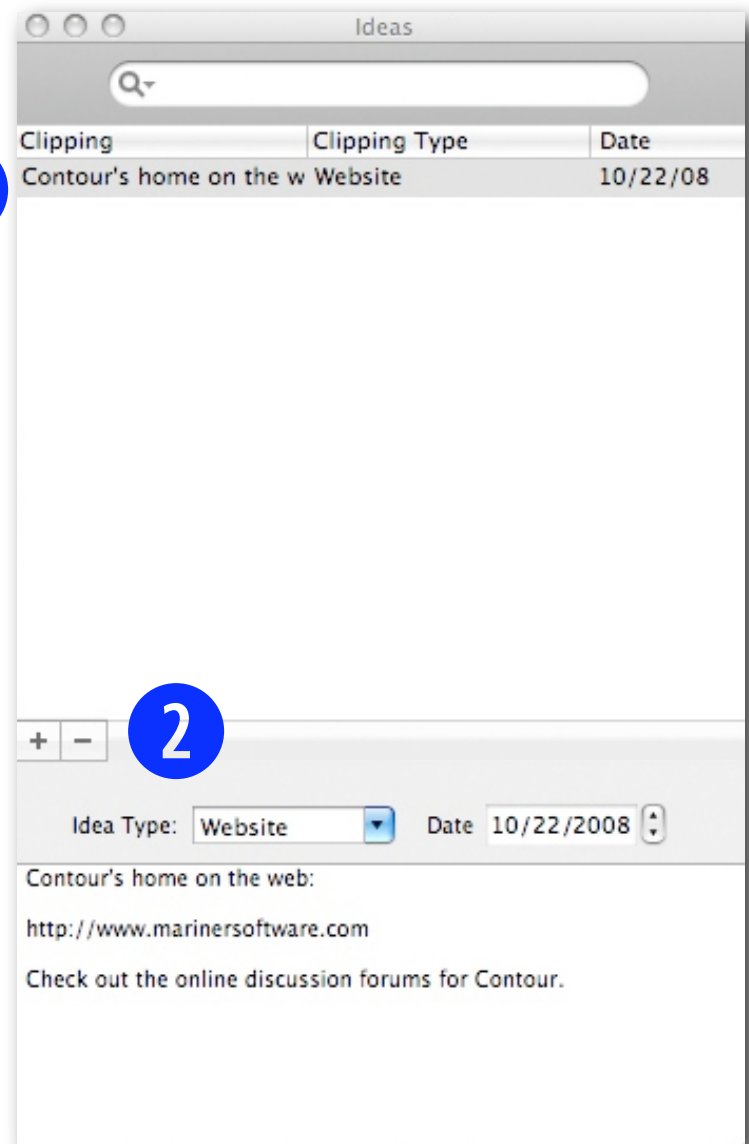
## Removing an Idea

To remove an idea from the Idea Pane:

- 1 Click on the idea you want to remove.
- 2 Click on the Remove (or minus) button.

### Hint:

Launch Contour and keep the Idea Pane visible at all times. You never know when your next great idea will come!



## Chapter 13: Now, What?

**W**e have been through quite a journey, getting a handle on what our story is about, creating the Central Question, and taking our protagonist through their archetypal stages, from Orphan, to Wanderer, to Warrior, and finally, to Martyr.

You've answered all of the questions along the way. The progress meter bar is now a bright green, and your slider has gotten quite a workout and has made it to the far right hand side of the bar.

Now, what? Dive right into the screenplay and start writing?

Not so fast. Any writer knows (and if you don't, you soon will) that writing is rewriting -- and writing some more -- and tweaking what you've got. Now, it's time to get to work refining your story.

Spend some time reviewing each step, and evaluate your answer to each question. Have you set up Act I sufficiently, and do your Yes/No reversals escalate in intensity? Is your protagonist's goal compelling enough to keep your audience interested for two hours in a dark theater? Is your Deflector someone who can stand up to your Protagonist or are they someone who seems like they would turn tail and run (LIVE FREE OR DIE HARD)?

Once you answer the questions to your satisfaction, it's time to move beyond Contour and start writing in the screenwriting software of your choice, such as Montage.

So, how do you get your work out of Contour?

### In This Chapter:

Printing a Structure Report

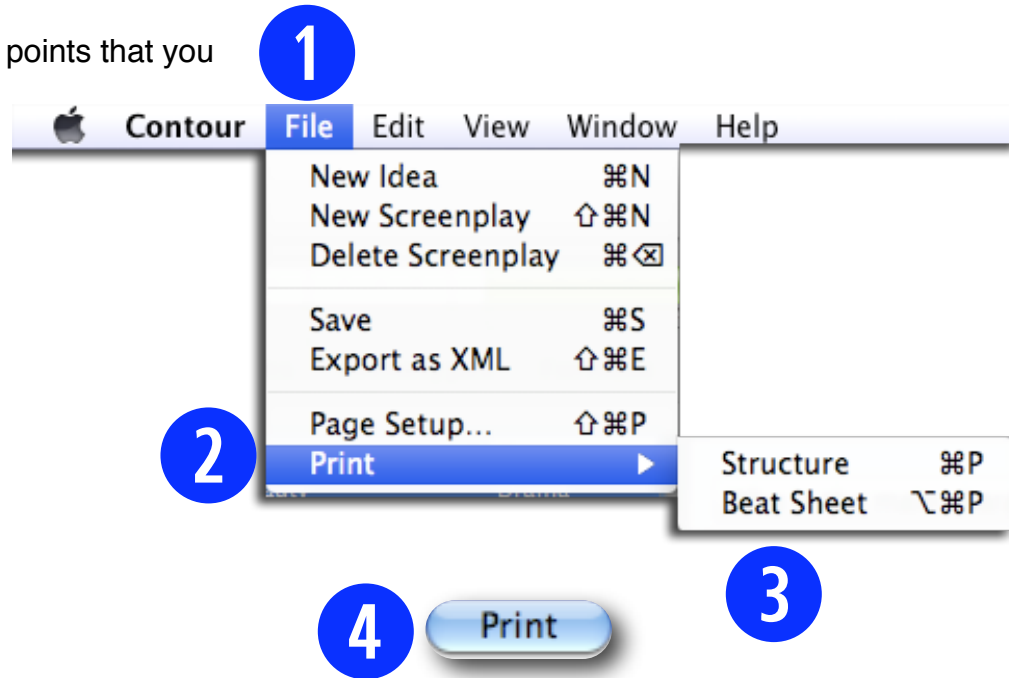
Printing a Beat Sheet



# Printing a Structure Report

The Structure Report provides you with the 44 plot points that you have created for your story.

- 1 Choose File.
- 2 Choose Print.
- 3 Choose Structure.
- 4 Click the Print button.



## Printing a Beat Sheet

The Beat Sheet provides you with the contents of the Guide.

- 1 Choose File.
- 2 Choose Print.
- 3 Choose Structure.
- 4 Click the Print button.

