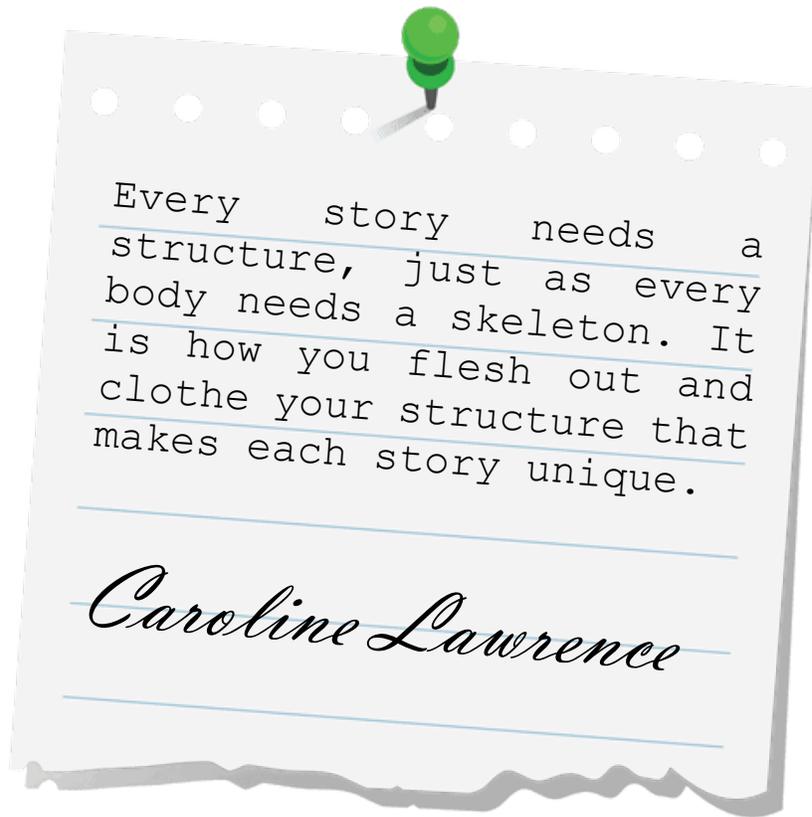




SCREENWRITING  
MENTORSHIP PROGRAM



THE BEAT SHEET



## This week is all about **structuring your plot**.

By this point you should have a marketable idea, compelling characters and a superb setting for your script to unfold in. With all that complete, it is finally time to delve into the plot of your screenplay. Figuring out the plot of your screenplay is no easy feat. You may be wondering how the heck we are going to do it in only one week! Don't worry. With the prep work you've done, you are more than ready for this phase.

This week we are going to be creating the "Beat Sheet" for your screenplay. A beat sheet is a general outline of the plot of your screenplay. By establishing the key beats of your screenplay, you are assuring that it will be structurally sound. This will provide you with an excellent reference point as we move into writing a detailed treatment of your screenplay next week.

Let's get started!

*Kate Niemuller*



# BEAT SHEET OVERVIEW



## WHAT IS A “BEAT SHEET”?

A beat sheet is a short 2-5 page document that outlines the key beats (or scenes) of your screenplay. Joined together, these beats should depict the most basic essence of your plot. These are the beats that your screenplay *needs* in order to a) make sense and b) progress the plot.

At Script Society, we believe that writing a beat sheet is a very important step in the screenwriting process. Why? Because it allows you to get a look at your overall story *before* you write it (or go into detail – like a treatment). By doing so, you are given the opportunity to catch inconsistencies and plot holes. It’s much better to troubleshoot structural issues like this early on, instead of after you’ve already written 30 pages of your script!

## WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BEAT SHEET & A TREATMENT?

Screenplay treatments are much more detailed in nature. A beat sheet is an overview of the plot, whereas a treatment is a scene-by-scene outline. I like to start with a beat sheet as it’s less overwhelming and allows the writer to ease into the plot aspect of their screenplay.

**ARE YOU WITH ME? GOOD. LET’S DIVE IN.**



# WRITING THE BEAT SHEET



## Don't let the blank page scare you.

Because guess what? That page isn't as blank as you think it is. Thanks to all the prep work we've done over week 1 & 2, writing a beat sheet for your screenplay is not going to be as hard as it sounds. To make it even easier, we are going to break down the entire thing, with examples, to help you on your way.

I'm going to be using an old classic as the example this week. It's a worldwide hit that you have *definitely* heard of (and if you haven't you must live under a rock): *Lord of the Rings & the Fellowship of the Ring*.

The reason I'm going to use this screenplay is because it follows a fairly traditional story telling structure & it's very well known. If you haven't seen it, I recommend you give it a watch before continuing with this lesson.

So, print out the "Structure Guide" & "Beat Sheet Worksheet" and let's get cracking.



## ACT ONE:



The first act of a screenplay is all about introductions: characters, conflict, setting, theme...etc. You are giving us a taste of what's normal and showing us how that's all going to change. The first act of *The Fellowship of the Ring* accomplishes this seamlessly.

It introduces our **Protagonist** (Frodo), the **Setting** (Middle earth), the **Theme** (of friendship and sacrifice), and the **Conflict** (the one ring).

So, in its essence, your first act needs to show us life as normal, the incident that changes everything and the “plan” your protagonist concocts in order to overcome that new conflict. Let's break it down into key beats.

**BEAT #1 (THE SETUP):** This is where you introduce the protagonist, their “normal life” and the theme.

**BEAT #2 (THE CATALYST):** This is where your protagonist is confronted with the screenplay's conflict, which forces them out of their normal life.

**BEAT #3 (THE DEBATE):** In this beat your protagonist “refuses” or “debates” the conflict. They may attempt to return to their normal life, only to realize they can't. This is a beat where they need to exhibit doubt about their mission.



**BEAT #4 (FIRST ACT TURN):** In this beat your protagonist will realize that they have no choice but to face their conflict. They prepare for their adventure.

## **EXAMPLE:**

### **BEAT #1: THE SETUP**

We learn of the vicious wars waged due to the power of the ring and how it came into Bilbo Baggins possession. Then, we go to the Shire where we meet Frodo Baggins. His Uncle Bilbo celebrates his 111th birthday.

### **BEAT #2: THE CATALYST**

Bilbo decides to leave the “ring” and everything he owns to Frodo, changing his life forever.

### **BEAT #3: THE DEBATE**

Gandalf discovers that ring Bilbo gave Frodo is the “one ring”. Dangerous Ring Wraiths are searching for it. Frodo must take it to Bree to save himself. Gandalf will meet him there. Frodo agrees to take it that far, but no further. He is no hero.

### **BEAT #3: FIRST ACT TURN**

Frodo and Samwise Gamgee (his friend and gardener) embark on a journey to Bree. They run into Pippin and Merry, fellow hobbits and friends who decide to accompany them.



## ACT TWO:



The second act of a screenplay is two-fold. The first half should focus on the “new world” that your protagonist has entered and the steps they are taking to accomplish their goal. Then, spurred by the events of the midpoint (also known as the point of no return), the second half of act two raises the stakes and pace.

There are twice as many key beats in act two than act one (which is fitting as act two should be twice as long as act 1).

**BEAT #1 (THE NEW WORLD):** In this beat your protagonist begins to explore their new world, coming up with a plan to deal with their conflict.

**BEAT #2 (TRIALS):** In this beat your protagonist begins to take active steps to face their conflict. They must overcome obstacle, after obstacle, which slowly begins to change them. This is a big segment. I recommend at least three trials for them to overcome in order to fill this section.

**BEAT #3 (MIDPOINT):** In this beat, our protagonist experiences a major change, that forces them onwards. This event must raise the stakes. This is the point of no return.

**BEAT #4 (HIGHER STAKES AND COMPLICATIONS):** In this beat, the protagonist faces even bigger obstacles with even higher stakes. The bad guys are closing in.



**BEAT #5 (ALL IS LOST):** In this beat, the Protagonist suffers a major loss that causes them to lose faith in their mission. At this point, all hope is lost. The Protagonist experiences failure and self-doubt.

**BEAT #6 (SECOND ACT TURN):** In this beat, an event occurs that renews hope in the Protagonist. They regroup, forming a new battle plan.

## EXAMPLE:

### **BEAT #1: NEW WORLD**

The hobbits embark on their journey to Bree, narrowly escaping death by those that hunt the Ring. None of them have ever been so far from home and the world out here is dangerous. They arrive at Bree only to find Gandalf isn't there. A ranger named Strider (Aragorn) saves them and offers them safe passage to the elf kingdom, Rivendell.

### **BEAT #2: TRIALS**

Aragorn and the hobbits make their way to Rivendell (Trial #1). The ring wraiths find them and stab Frodo (Trial #2). Arwen, an elven princess from Rivendell, saves him and makes it to Rivendell, fighting off the ring wraiths herself (Trial #3). Frodo wakes, healed. Gandalf, his hobbit friends and Aragorn are all there. They made it.

### **BEAT #3: MIDPOINT**

Frodo believes he has accomplished his task: he got the ring to Rivendell. He is ready to go home. But before he does, a meeting is held about the ring and what to do with it. Frodo sees first hand how it corrupts those who come near it. He volunteers to destroy it in Mordor. The other hobbits, Gandalf, Aragorn, a man, an elf and a dwarf join him. The Fellowship of the Ring is born.

### **BEAT #4: HIGHER STAKES AND COMPLICATIONS**

The fellowship embarks on their journey to Mordor. They grow close, but danger looms around them. A battle greets them in the Mines of Moria. They fight and narrowly escape only to be confronted by mythical dragon-like creature known as a Balrog. The only one strong enough to fight it is Gandalf.



### **BEAT #5: ALL IS LOST**

The Balrog defeats Gandalf and he falls to his death. They must press on without Gandalf. The others get the hobbits to safety. They find refuge with Elves in the forest. Frodo doesn't think he can go on without Gandalf.

### **BEAT #6: SECOND ACT TURN**

Frodo confesses his fears to a wise elf, named Galadriel. She shows him the importance of his task. Frodo realizes he must go on and vows to put an end to the ring.



## ACT THREE:



The final act of your screenplay will have the elements of your plot come together. The climax has arrived and your protagonist will either win or lose.

There are 3 beats in this Act:

**BEAT #1 (THE FINAL PUSH):** In this beat, the protagonist races towards the climax. All storylines should begin to collide here (if they haven't already.)

**BEAT #2 (THE CLIMAX):** The final confrontation between the Protagonist and their conflict occurs. They will either win or lose.

**BEAT #3 (THE RESOLUTION):** In this final beat, we wrap up the story and/or provide the groundwork for a sequel.

## EXAMPLE:

### **BEAT #1: FINAL PUSH**

A dark wizard, Sarumon, sends his army out in search of the fellowship and the ring. Meanwhile, the Fellowship is given gifts by the Elves as they prepare to embark on their journey once more. They are ambushed by Sarumon's army. A battle breaks out.



## **BEAT #2: CLIMAX**

As the battle reaches its climax, a member of the Fellowship is killed. Two others are kidnapped (hobbits Merry and Pippin). The Fellowship falls apart. Sam and Frodo are left defenseless.

## **BEAT #3: RESOLUTION**

Determined to destroy the ring, Frodo and Sam head off together, alone in a dangerous world with a gigantic task.

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*Note: You are welcome to make your beats more or less detailed than the example above. As long as the information correctly portrays what needs to happen, you're golden!*