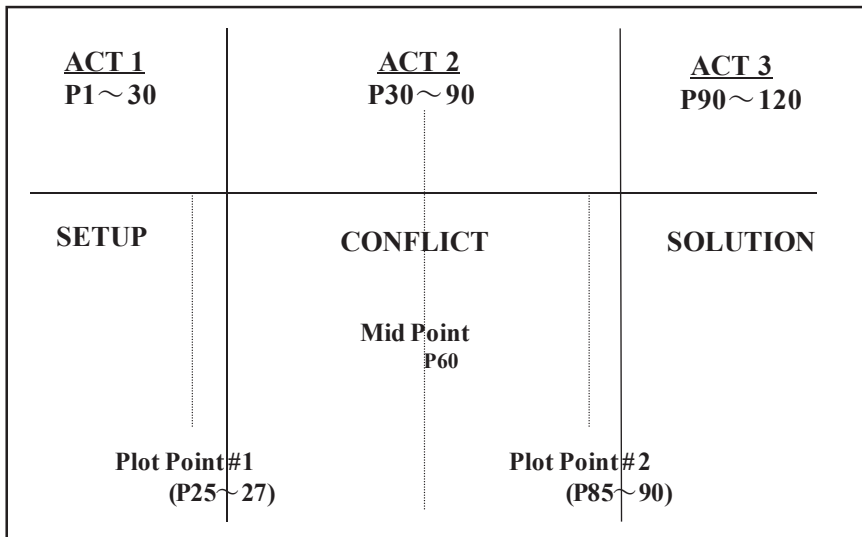


The first section, or the first thirty pages, is Act 1. The next two sections comprising sixty pages are Act 2 and the last section, or the last thirty pages, is Act 3. The ratio is 1:2:1. Dividing something into smaller sections allows you to analyze the space or length without using any measuring equipment. It makes it easier for you to analyze each smaller section.

Let us look at each section.

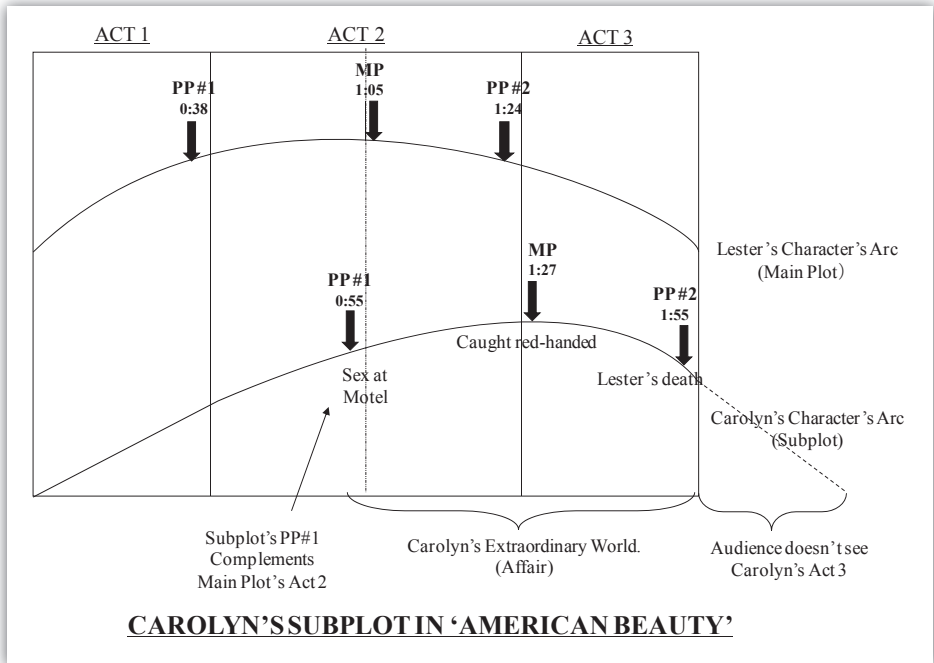
Act 1 is the Setup. Within the first ten to fifteen minutes of Act 1, the audience needs to be introduced to your protagonist and needs to know what the story is about. Act 1 is usually about the protagonist's everyday life or routine. The audience is informed about the situation or environment the protagonist lives in and the problems he faces. The Premise is usually stated at the beginning of the movie. The Premise is a simple statement that will be debated throughout the movie.



Syd Field's Basic Format

For example, in 'AMERICAN BEAUTY', we see the following statement in Lester's VO, five minutes after movie starts.

"But you know what? It's never too late to get it back."



0:13:50

We move to the basketball game at the school gym. This seems to be a big scene because this is where Lester sees Angela for the first time. We are now fifteen minutes into the movie and Lester is infatuated with Angela. Some people may think this is Plot Point #1 but let us go back to the definition of a Plot Point: any incident or episode that hooks into the action and spins it around in another direction. Did Lester's vector change dramatically after he sees Angela at the gym? Yes, but somehow it is not enough because he does not take any actual action. In a movie, only action counts. Only action defines who your character is. So this gym scene is not Plot Point #1, but a temptation from the Extraordinary World for Lester. It is a Call to Adventure. In this scene, Lester finds out about Angela, the object of his burning desire, but he does not take any significant action yet.

As we saw in the example of 'STAR WARS' earlier, we usually have a couple of Calls to Adventure before your protagonist actually reaches the real Plot Point #1. Each time, the Call to Adventure becomes stronger in intensity, until it finally pushes the protagonist into his Extraordinary World.