

# SAVE THE CAT

Blake Snyder's [SAVE THE CAT](#) books are arguably the most popular, accessible and easy to use resource for screenwriters of the last twenty years. I especially love his [ten story types or "genres"](#). The "Beat Sheet" is also a popular tool for analyzing and developing three-act story structure in screenplays. Here is my own paraphrased and augmented explanation of the fifteen "Beats": (Target page numbers are in parentheses, and examples from the movie LEGALLY BLONDE in ALL CAPS.)

1. Opening Image (1): The audience is first engaged with something compelling that sets the tone – and we begin to see how things are as they are right now (they will be clearly different at the end).
2. Theme Stated (5): Usually spoken to the main character in a snippet of dialogue, this gives a sense of the deeper issues that this story is "about."
3. Set-Up Section (1-10): We meet the main character, who is living a compromised life in some way, while dealing with problems – and has something about them we can respect or like. We get a broad enough sense of their "status quo" life to feel we understand them, and can begin to care about them. We see the world through their eyes, and will for the rest of the movie — meaning we mostly get what they are thinking, feeling, wanting and trying to achieve, from scene to scene. There are no big crises yet – but examples of life as it is. (The first act presents the "thesis" of their current life.)  
WE MEET SORORITY GIRL ELLE, AND SEE THAT SHE'S A GOOD PERSON BUT KIND OF SILLY, NAÏVE, WITH A LIMITED VISION OF WHAT HER LIFE COULD BE.
4. Catalyst (12): An event rocks the main character's world completely, and sets in motion the central problem of the story. It's an external problem (not just internal, about thoughts and emotions) that demands to be dealt with now – it has clear and present stakes we can identify with and feel.  
WARNER BREAKS UP WITH ELLE.
5. Debate Section (12-25): The main character questions what has happened, tries to figure out what to do, and often seeks to avoid the true "call to adventure." But they don't just talk: they take initial logical actions to try to fix things, which fail, narrowing their options.  
ELLE REELS FROM THE BREAKUP, TRIES TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO, FINALLY DECIDES TO TRY TO GET INTO HARVARD LAW, AND BEGINS THE WORK NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE THAT.
6. Break into Two (25): The main character enters an "upside down world" – where they're completely out of their element. This is a new arena for them, where they're overmatched as they attempt to confront their story problem. (They will stay in this "antithesis" to their normal life until the Break into Three.)  
ELLE ARRIVES AT HARVARD LAW, HAVING BEEN ACCEPTED.
7. B Story (30): A second story begins, which will run parallel to the "A Story", and interweave with it throughout the rest of the movie. The theme and the character's inner journey tends to be explored here. (Often it's the "love story," or deals with some relationship issue. Like the "A Story," it's about a problem that builds and develops. It can't just be a relationship that's going well.)  
ELLE MEETS PAULETTE, WHO HAS HER OWN PROBLEM WITH MEN.

8. Fun and Games Section (30-55): The entertaining aspects of the story's premise are explored (in scenes that might make the movie trailer) – highlighting the main character's unlikeliness for this “upside down world – which are fun to watch, but NOT fun for the main character, who is essentially in HELL until the end of the story.

LIFE AT HARVARD IS HELLISH FOR ELLE, AND WARNER IS ENGAGED TO SOMEONE ELSE — WHO GETS HER KICKED OUT OF CLASS, AND TURNED INTO A LAUGHING STOCK. SHE WORKS TO FIND HER PLACE THERE, WITH EMMETT'S HELP.

9. Midpoint (55): The stakes are raised: the problem becomes more focused, more serious, more important and urgent.

ELLE GETS THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ON THE BIG CASE WITH THE FITNESS QUEEN, ALONGSIDE WARNER – THERE IS NOW A LARGER FUTURE POTENTIAL FOR HER, AND SHE'S DOING SOMETHING WITH BIG CONSEQUENCES FOR OTHERS.

10. Bad Guys Close In Section (55-75): There may be no specific “bad guys,” but the PROBLEMS should get worse and worse – the main character seems to be failing in their approach, and/or is facing more and more seemingly impossible obstacles. Things escalate with their antagonistic forces, often with a “punch-counterpunch” feel (their relationships with allies tend to break down, too). Note the page count here — this section, along with Fun & Games, Finale, Set-up & Debate are made up of multiple scenes, and represent big chunks of the movie.

WORK ON THE CASE IS DIFFICULT, AND THEY SEEM TO BE LOSING. ULTIMATELY, THE PROFESSOR HITS ON ELLE.

11. All Is Lost (75): The story seems to be over, and the main character seems to have no hope now. The main problem of the story seems to have been answered in the negative. Everything they were trying has failed, and they have no other options. Things are worse than ever before.

ELLE IS OFF THE CASE, AND IS GOING TO LEAVE IN DISGRACE.

12. Dark Night of the Soul (somewhere between 75 and 85): The main character reels from the “all is lost” – and there's often a “whiff of death.”

ELLE IS HUMILIATED, BELIEVING SHE NEVER DESERVED TO BE HERE AFTER ALL, AND IS QUESTIONING WHO SHE IS.

13. Break into Three (85): A new idea, a new hope, a new plan for solving the story problem emerges (often the A Story and B Story “cross” – the B Story should also be unresolved and at its worst).

ELLE WILL GET BACK ON THE CASE THANKS TO THE SUPPORT OF HER FRIENDS (INCLUDING PAULETTE, WHO SHE HAS HELPED), AND EMMETT.

14. Finale Section (85-110): A five-part challenge akin to “storming the castle to rescue the princess.” The hero fails at first, and is pressed to their absolute limit – forced to confront their own demons, and possibly change their approach to life – before the story problem is finally resolved.

ELLE WORKS TO WIN THE CASE. THIS ULTIMATELY GETS WARNER'S ATTENTION, BUT SHE DOESN'T WANT HIM ANYMORE – SHE DISCOVERED A NEW VERSION OF HERSELF, AND THE LIFE SHE WANTS.

15. Final Image (110): Reflecting the new status quo now that this story is over.