

The Six Stages of a Story (*According to Hollywood*)

adapted from The Hero's Two Journeys by Michael Hauge (This is the first journey – the visible journey)

Stage One: **Set-up** (first 10%)

Introduce the hero. Create identification. Show the world before the complication. At the end of stage one, a turning point occurs: a new opportunity. 10 minutes. . .

Stage Two: **New Situation** (second 15%)

Opportunity. The new situation creates new desire in the hero. This new desire is not the hero's main goal in the story. Rather the new desire is just to go somewhere new. Often the hero thinks it will be fun and easy. Stage two consists of the hero and audience getting familiar with the new situation. At the end of this stage another turning point occurs: Something happens that makes the hero begins to pursue the main goal of the story. In *Titanic*, the girl gets on the ship. In *the Firm*, the young lawyer learns the company is a front for the mob and he needs to get out. This is when the real story gets underway. The hero begins a plan. In a traditional play, this is the **end of Act I**. . .25 minutes. . .

Stage Three: **Change of plans** (next 25%),

Progress. The plan seems to be working. The hero deals with obstacles and complications. Then, at the mid-point of the story, the hero reaches the third turning point—the point of no return. Bridges are burned. In *the Firm*, this point is reached in the scene on a park bench when the hero says, “Are you telling me my life is in danger?” and he is told “I’m telling you your life as you know it is over.” The hero is nearer to the destination than to the origin. . . .50 minutes. . .

Stage Four: **Higher Stakes and Worse Complications**

Trouble. The hero cannot return to the world as it was. Troubles get worse and the stakes get higher. Things keep getting tougher and tougher until the next turning point occurs at the end of this stage: the major setback. This occurs 75% through the story and makes it appear that all is lost. But the hero can't give up. **End of Act II**. . . .75 minutes. . .

Stage Five: **Do or die**

Risk. The plan is in shambles. The bridges are burned. The hero makes a final push that is do or die. The hero must risk everything or the audience won't care. The fifth and final turning point is the climax. . . .90 minutes. . .

Stage Six: **The Aftermath**

Resolution. The hero achieves the goal or fails. After this, the audience sees the new life that's being lived. The audience has to experience the emotional consequence of the story. The length of the aftermath varies, depending on how many issues need to be resolved, but the resolution needs to be experienced. **End of Act III**. . . .95 minutes. . .