

Editing Theory

BFM7121 Basic Editing

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Beginning, Middle and End

- Frame - the smallest unit in film
- Shot – from one cut to the other
- Scene – unity of place
- Episode – unity of theme
- 8 Sequences – unique unit to film medium
- 3 Acts
- Film

The Greek Legacy: 3-Act Story Structure

- We have inherited the 3-act structural paradigm of drama from the Greeks.
- In 321 B.C., **Aristotle** laid down the principles of dramatic structure which we still adhere to, in his book *Poetics*.
- French New Wave filmmaker **Jean-Luc Godard** said “All stories have a beginning, middle and end, but not necessarily in that order”

The Premise

- Premise in feature films generally follows this structure:
- A certain type of person has a certain goal, and encounters obstacles that have changed him/her when finally they do (or do not) achieve that goal.
- Namely, the structure is composed of:
 - 1) The Exposition (or SETUP)
 - 2) The Confrontation (or DEVELOPMENT)
 - 3) The Resolution (or DENOUEMENT) of the dramatic problem posed by the story...
- Or more simply: in Act One you get a person up a tree, in Act Two you throw rocks at them, and in Act Three you get them down again.

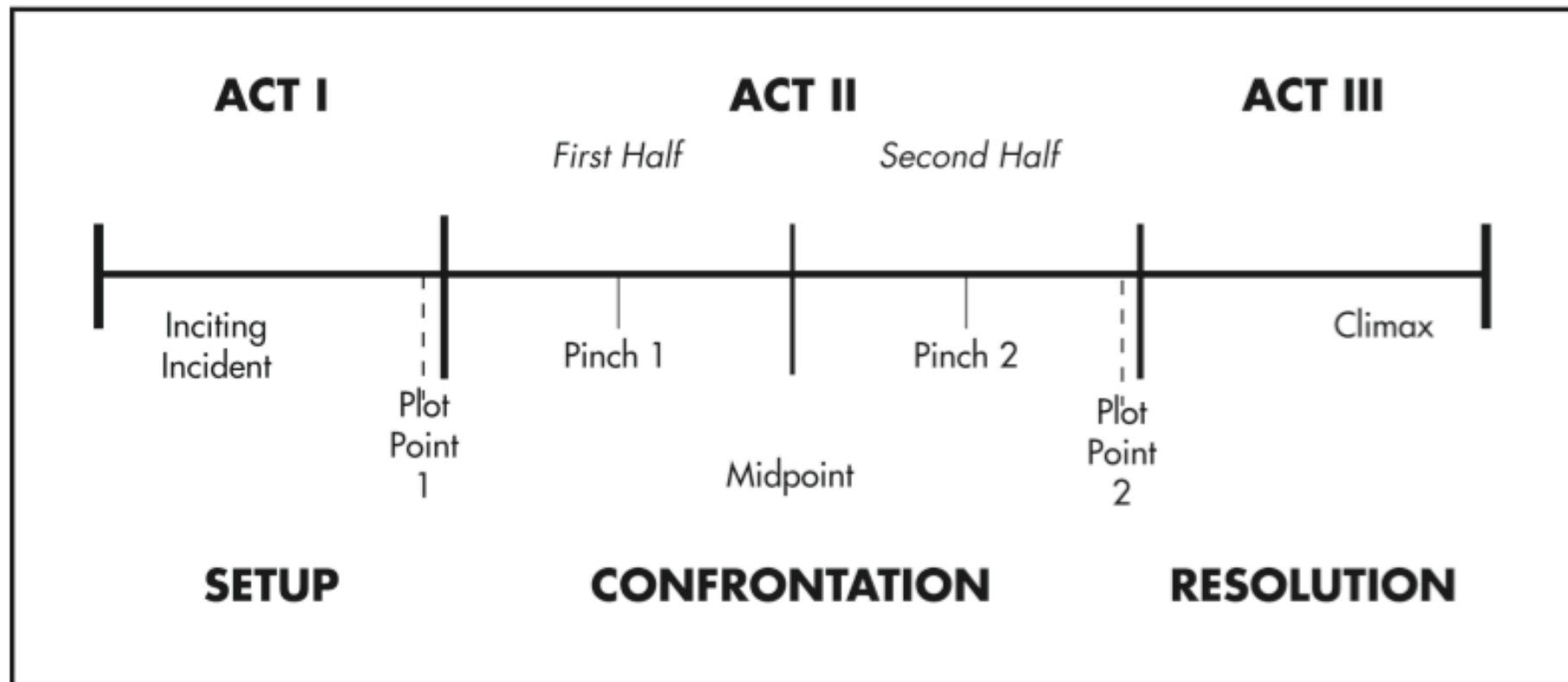
The Premise

- The key philosophy behind a film Premise is:
"Somebody want something badly and is having difficulty getting it."

Syd Field's Paradigm

- **Syd Field**, author of *Screenplay and The Screen Writer's Workbook*, has outlined a paradigm that most screenplays follow.
- According to Field, screenplays follow a three-act structure, meaning the standard screenplay can be divided into three parts: **Setup, Confrontation, and Resolution**.
- Act I comprises the first quarter of the screenplay.
 - For a two hour movie, Act I would last approximately 30 minutes.
- Act II comprises the next two quarters of the film.
 - For a two hour movie, Act II would last approximately 60 minutes.
- Act III comprises the final quarter of the film.
 - For a two hour movie, Act III would be the final 30 minutes.

The Syd Field "Paradigm"



The Plot Point

- According to Field, the three acts are separated by **two plot points**.
- **A plot point**, often called a reversal, is an event that thrusts the plot in a new direction, leading into a new act of the screenplay.
 - Later screenplay gurus have built on Field's theory by stating that Plot Point #1, which leads into Act II, is the moment when the hero takes on the problem.
- **Pinch** - A reminder scene that brings up the central conflict of the drama, reminding us of the overall conflict.

Act I - Setup

- **Exposition** - The part of a story that introduces the characters, shows some of their interrelationships, and places them within a time and place.
- This part of the story introduces the main character, the dramatic premise, and the dramatic situation.
- **Main character** - the person in the story who has a need/objective to fulfill and whose actions drive the story
- **Dramatic premise** - what the story's about
- **Dramatic situation** - the circumstances surrounding the action
- **Inciting Incident** - an event that sets the plot of the film in motion. It occurs approximately halfway through the first act.
- **Plot Point #1**, which leads into Act II, is the moment when the hero takes on the problem.

Act II - Confrontation

- **Obstacles** - In the second act, the main character encounters obstacle after obstacle that prevent him from achieving his dramatic need.
- **First Culmination** - a point just before the halfway point of the film where the main character seems close to achieving his or her goal/objective. Then, everything falls apart, leading to the midpoint.
- **Midpoint** - a point approximately halfway through the film where the main character reaches his/her lowest point and seems farthest from fulfilling the dramatic need or objective.
- **Plot Point #2** - an event that thrusts the plot in a new direction, leading into a third act.

Act III - Resolution

- **Climax (Second Culmination)** - The point at which the plot reaches its maximum tension and the forces in opposition confront each other at a peak of physical or emotional action.
- **Denouement** - The brief period of calm at the end of a film where a state of equilibrium returns.

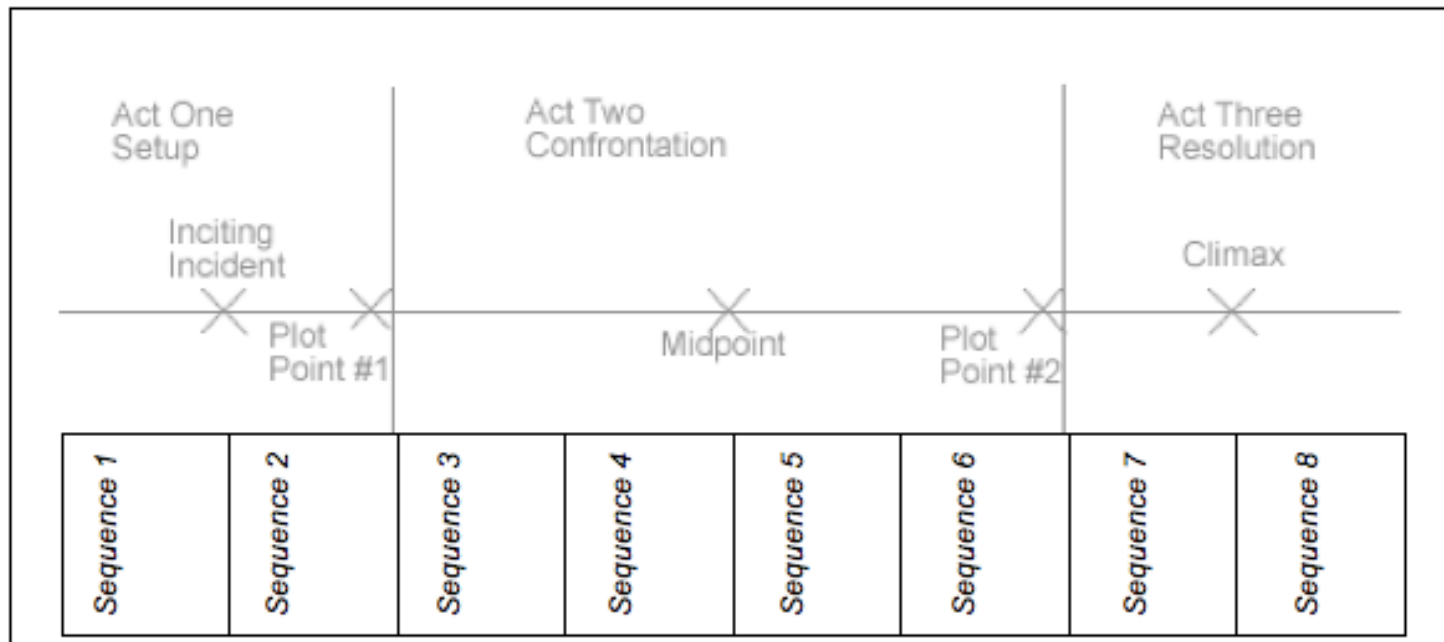
The Eight-Sequence Structure

- The sequence approach to screenwriting, sometimes known as “**Eight-sequence structure**”, is a system developed by **Frank Daniel**, while he was the head of the Graduate Screenwriting Program at University of Southern California.
- It is based, in part on the fact that, in the early days of cinema, technical matters forced screenwriters to divide their stories into sequences, each the length of a reel (about ten minutes).
- The sequence approach mimics that early style. The story is broken up into eight 10-15 minute sequences. The sequences serve as "mini-movies", each with their own compressed three-act structure. The first two sequences combine to form the film's first act. The next four create the film's second act. The final two sequences complete the resolution and denouement of the story. Each sequence's resolution creates the situation which sets up the next sequence.

The Eight-Sequence Structure

- Sequence 1 - Status Quo
- Sequence 2 - Raise of Problem
- Sequence 3 - Raising Action
- Sequence 4 - First Culmination
- Sequence 5 - Emotionally Slower Episode
- Sequence 6 - Second Culmination
- Sequence 7 - False Resolution
- Sequence 8 - True Resolution

The Three-Act and Eight-Sequence Structure



The Eight-Sequence Structure

- ACT 1
- Sequence 1 - Status Quo
 - Establishes the routine or “status Quo” of the main character before the problem of the film enters and disrupts his/her life. Typically near the end of this sequence we have a **Inciting Incident** or **Point of attack** which will change the character’s life by the end of Act One.
- Sequence 2 - Raise of Problem
 - The character and the problem are in collision course. By the end of Act One Protagonist knows that they have a serious problem and they have to do something about it.

The Eight-Sequence Structure

- ACT II
- Sequence 3 - Raising Action
 - The protagonist tries to solve the problem by doing what seems easier the first. This is a sequence for eliminating easy alternatives.
- Sequence 4 - First Culmination
 - Protagonist tries harder to solve the problem. **Culmination** or minor climax happens around **Mid Point** of the story.
- Sequence 5 - Emotionally Slower Episode
 - Sometimes called “romance” sequence. Time for rethinking and regrouping.
- Sequence 6 - Second Culmination
 - Final escalating sequence of the Second Act.

The Eight-Sequence Structure

- ACT III
- Sequence 7 - False Resolution
 - This is the way we think the movie will end based on what just happened in the end of Second Act. Usually this sequence ends with a **TWIST** in the end that sets the story to new direction.
- Sequence 8 - True Resolution
 - How the story really ends.

Hero's Journey Story Template

- The hero's journey story template was discovered by anthropologist **Joseph Campbell** after studying thousands of the world's myths. In his book ***The Hero With A Thousand Faces*** he revealed the basic 'monomyth' that united all cultures via narrative.
- **Christopher Vogler** refined it in his book ***The Writer's Journey*** which Hollywood embraced in the 1990's.

Hero's Journey

The Hero starts in their Ordinary World. The Herald appears, and announces the Call to Adventure. The Hero refuses it.

A Mentor appears, and gives the Hero the 'supernatural' key, tool or aid they need to embark on the quest.

The Hero then reluctantly accepts, and crosses the First Threshold (which is guarded by Threshold Guardians) and enter into the Other world, where they meet with Tests, Allies and Enemies on their way to confronting the Shadow (their nemesis).

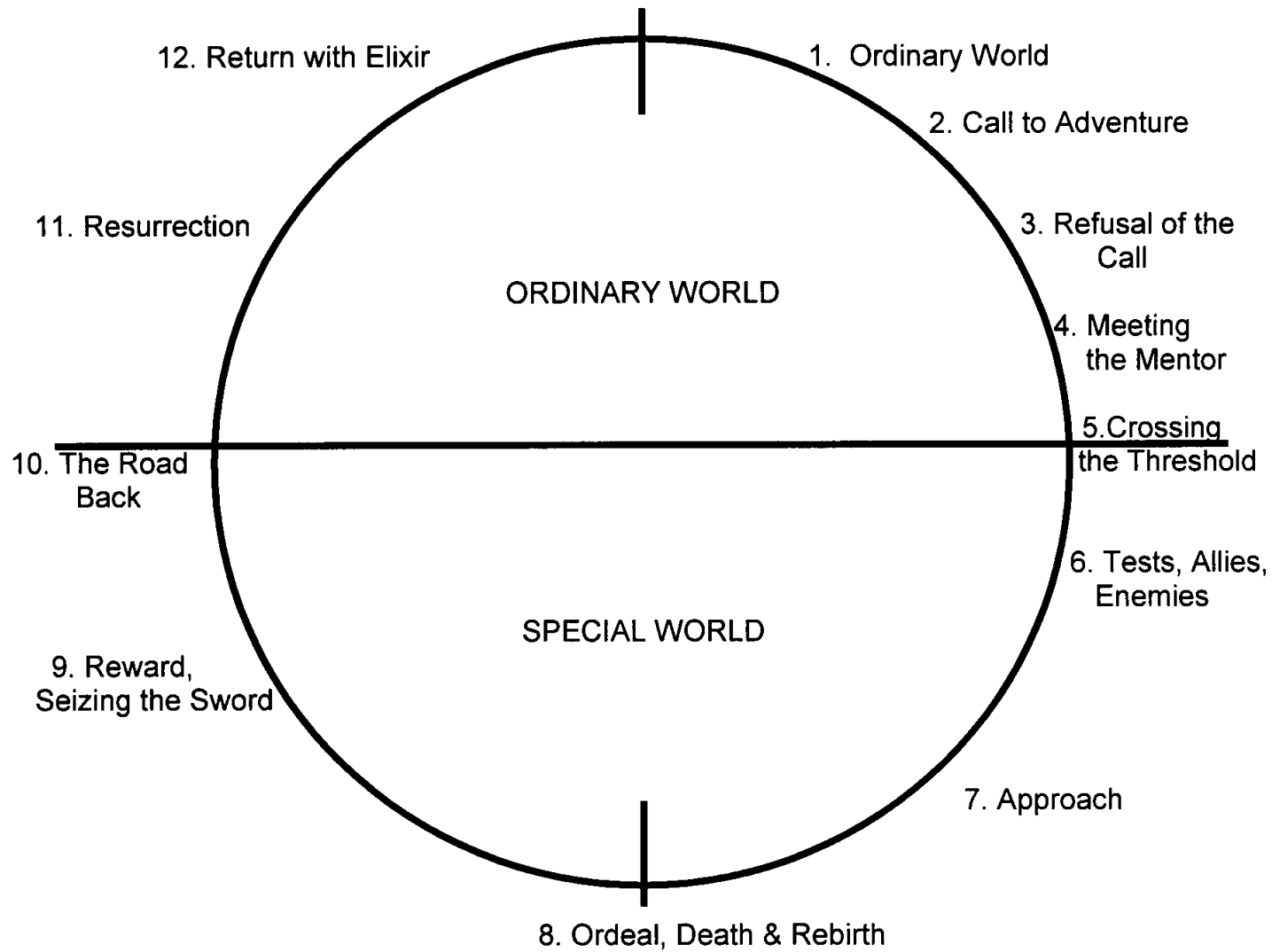
The Hero also can encounter a Trickster (who may become a sidekick character) along the way, and a Shapeshifter (who first appears as an ally but becomes an enemy - or vice-versa, or another character type altogether).

If it is a male Hero, along the way they may meet the Heroine, who may also be the love interest, (or indeed the Jewel/Sword/Elixir).

They approach the Innermost Cave (often the Shadow's headquarters), confront the Shadow, seize the sword (reward) and then escape, and the Road Back usually involves a chase.

Finally they return to their tribe and restore the elixir, bringing a boon to the community.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY



Hero's Journey

■ 1. THE ORDINARY WORLD

- The hero, uneasy, uncomfortable or unaware, is introduced sympathetically so the audience can identify with the situation or dilemma. The hero is shown against a background of environment, heredity, and personal history. Some kind of polarity in the hero's life is pulling in different directions and causing stress.

■ 2. THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

- Something shakes up the situation, either from external pressures or from something rising up from deep within, so the hero must face the beginnings of change.

■ 3. REFUSAL OF THE CALL

- The hero feels the fear of the unknown and tries to turn away from the adventure, however briefly. Alternately, another character may express the uncertainty and danger ahead.

■ 4. MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

- The hero comes across a seasoned traveler of the worlds who gives him or her training, equipment, or advice that will help on the journey. Or the hero reaches within to a source of courage and wisdom.

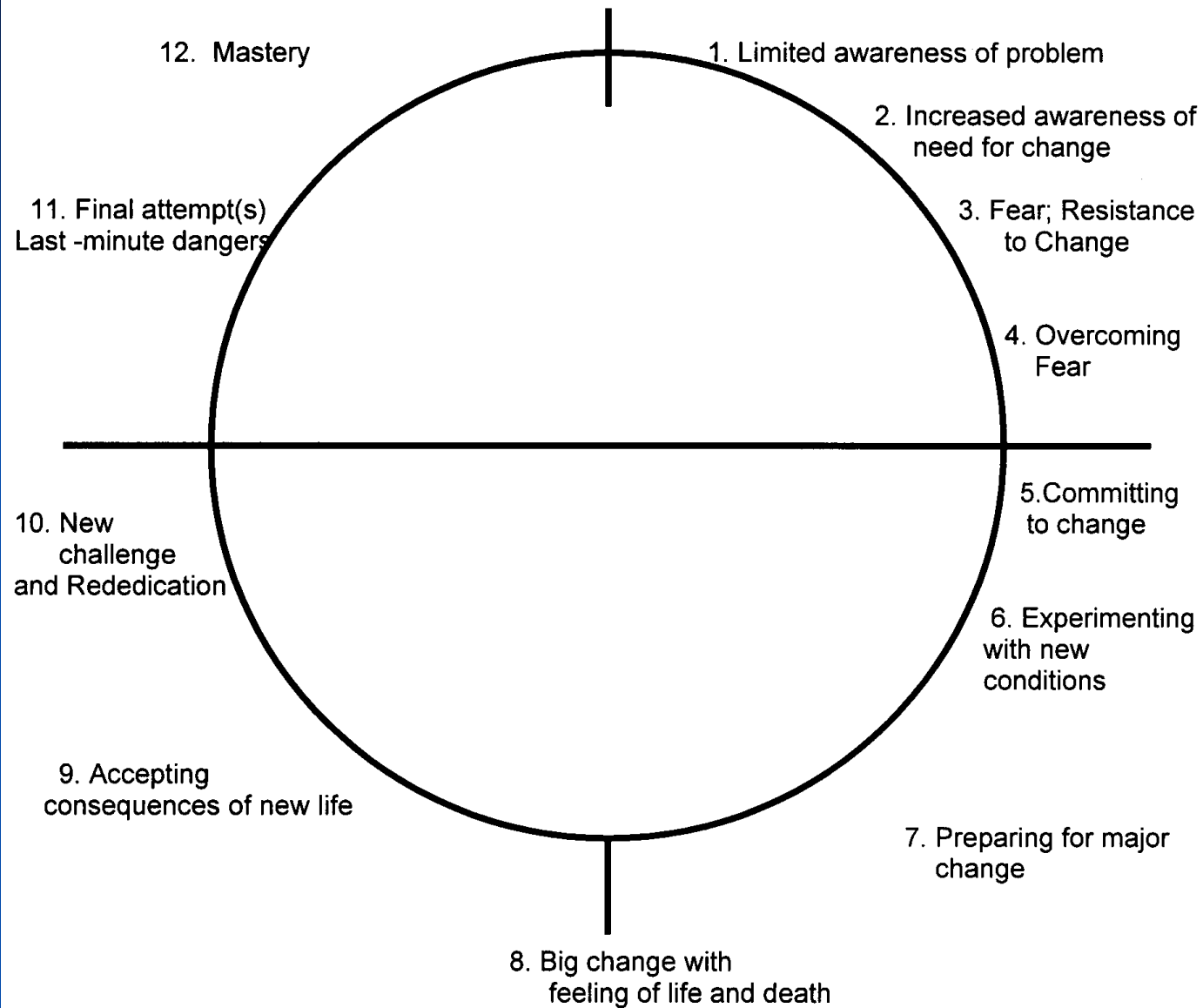
■ 5. CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

- At the end of Act One, the hero commits to leaving the Ordinary World and entering a new region or condition with unfamiliar rules and values.

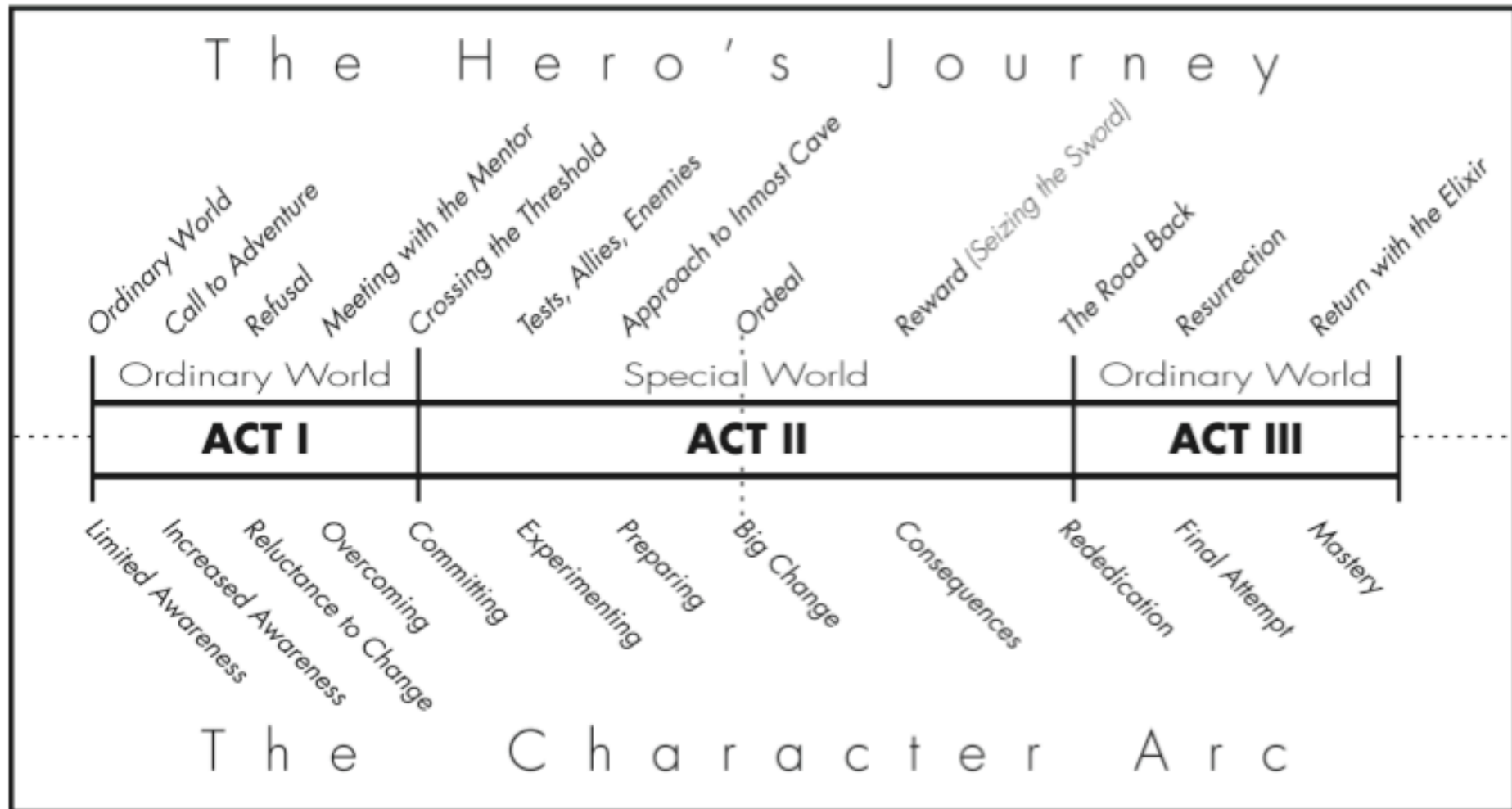
Hero's Journey

- 6. TESTS, ALLIES AND ENEMIES
 - The hero is tested and sorts out allegiances in the Special World.
- 7. APPROACH
 - The hero and newfound allies prepare for the major challenge in the Special world.
- 8. THE ORDEAL
 - Near the middle of the story, the hero enters a central space in the Special World and confronts death or faces his or her greatest fear. Out of the moment of death comes a new life.
- 9. THE REWARD
 - The hero takes possession of the treasure won by facing death. There may be celebration, but there is also danger of losing the treasure again.
- 10. THE ROAD BACK
 - About three-fourths of the way through the story, the hero is driven to complete the adventure, leaving the Special World to be sure the treasure is brought home. Often a chase scene signals the urgency and danger of the mission.
- 11. THE RESURRECTION
 - At the climax, the hero is severely tested once more on the threshold of home. He or she is purified by a last sacrifice, another moment of death and rebirth, but on a higher and more complete level. By the hero's action, the polarities that were in conflict at the beginning are finally resolved.
- 12. RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR
 - The hero returns home or continues the journey, bearing some element of the treasure that has the power to transform the world as the hero has been transformed.

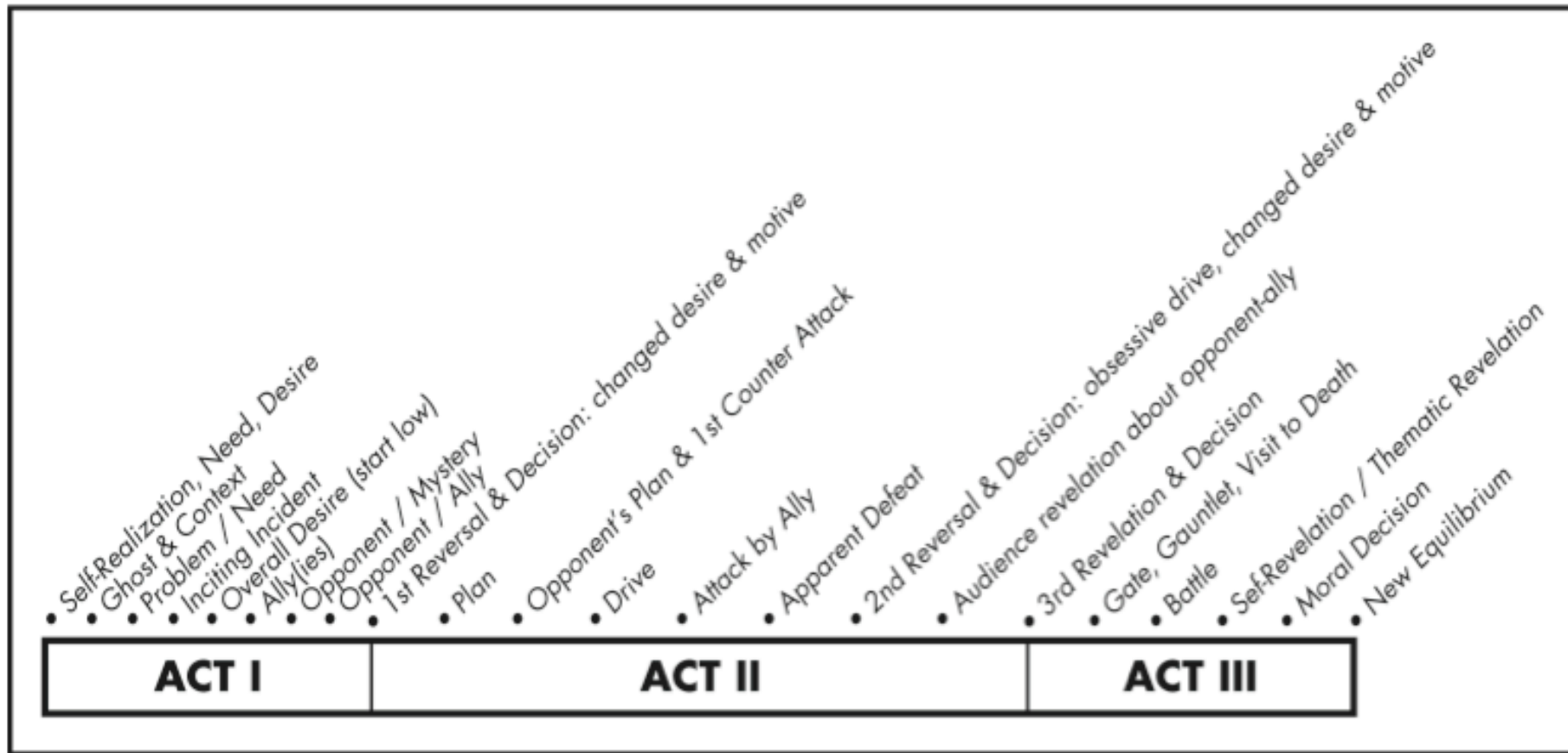
THE HERO'S INNER JOURNEY



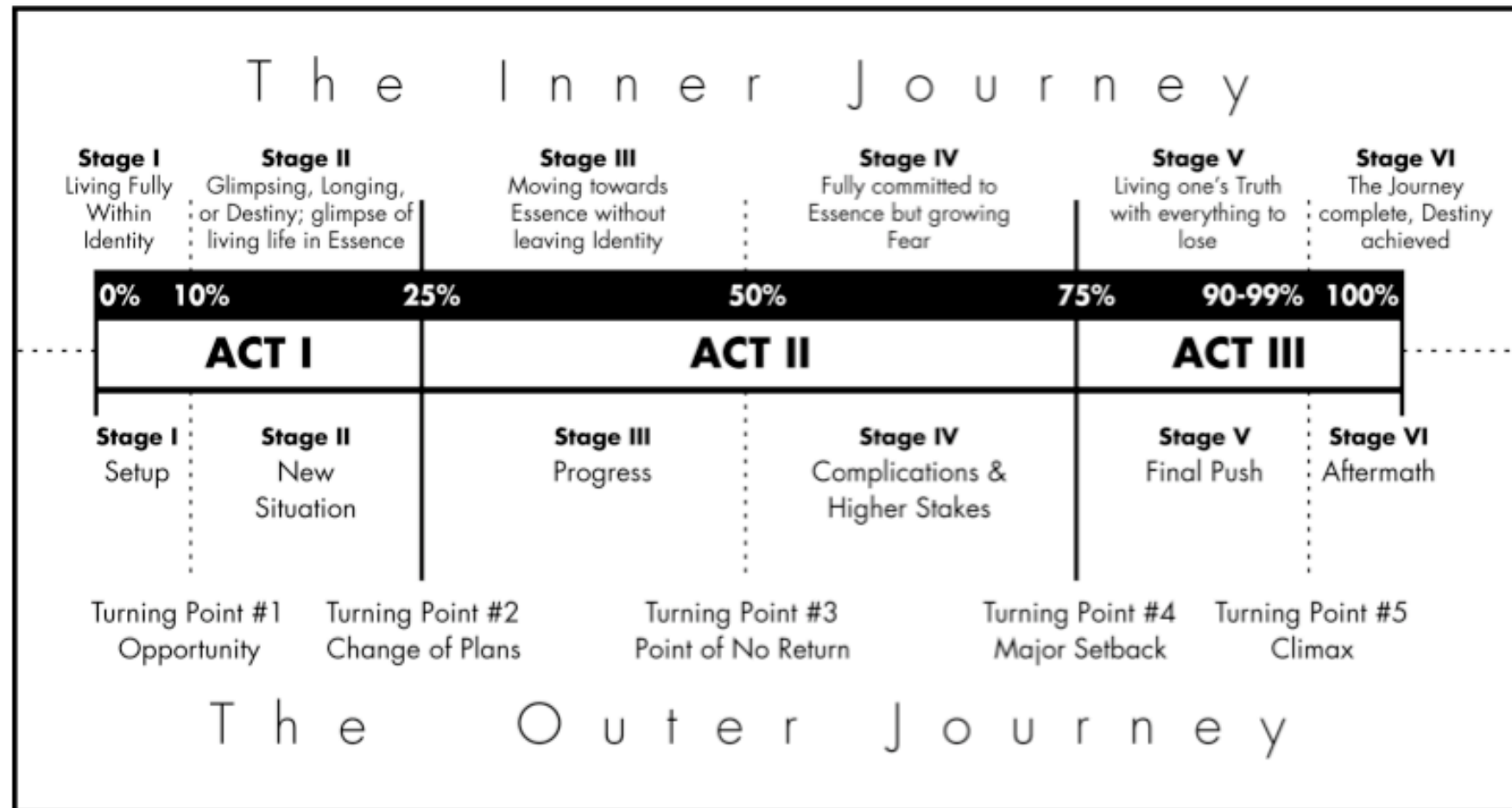
Christopher Vogler "The Hero's Journey"



John Truby's "Twenty-two Building Blocks"



Michael Hauge's "Six Stage Plot Structure"



Story Analysis Questions

- Whose story is it? Who is the PROTAGONIST?
- What is the story's MAIN CONFLICT?
- What is the story's MAIN TENSION?
- As an audience, what are we hoping for?
- What do we fear?
- What is at the stake?
- Where is the risk?
- What is the story's central THEME?
- What does the protagonist WANT? (conscious pursuit)
- What does the protagonist NEED? (usually unconscious)
- How does he/she changes in the story?
- What does the antagonist WANT? (conscious pursuit) What does the antagonist NEED? (usually unconscious) How does he/she changes in the story?

Types of connections between the shots

(Katz, Steven D. Film Directing Shot by Shot.)

■ **Spatial connection**

- Creating the illusion of continuous space
 - Long shot of the door / Close up of the door opening

■ **Temporal connection**

- Creating a illusion of continuous time
 - Shot of ball thrown to air / ball drops to basket

Types of connections between the shots

(Katz, Steven D. Film Directing Shot by Shot.)

■ Graphical connection

- two shots are visually similar
 - Full moon / Round woman's face

■ Logical connection

- two shots are connected by association
 - Shot of bone - first weapon / shot of space ship - future weapon

■ Rhythmic connection

- shots are cut together by the rhythm (music, tempo, visual rhythms)

Six elements of the shot

(Thomson, Roy. Grammar of the Edit.)

- **Motivation** – every cut must be motivated
- **Information** – every shot should give us new information, move story forward
- **Composition** – changing the shot size and angle
- **Sound** – sound starting before or after the cut ("L" and "J" cut)
- **Camera angle** (180 degree and 30 degree rule)
- **Continuity** – continuity of content, movement, position, sound

Five types of Edit

(Thomson, Roy. Grammar of the Edit.)

- **Action edit** – continuity edit or movement edit
- **Screen position edit** – directional edit or placement edit (guiding the viewers attention point)
- **Form edit** – cutting together graphically similar shots
- **Concept edit** – ideas edit or montage (cut creates new meanings)
- **Combined edit** – combination of all previous types of edits

Question and Answer Pattern in Editing

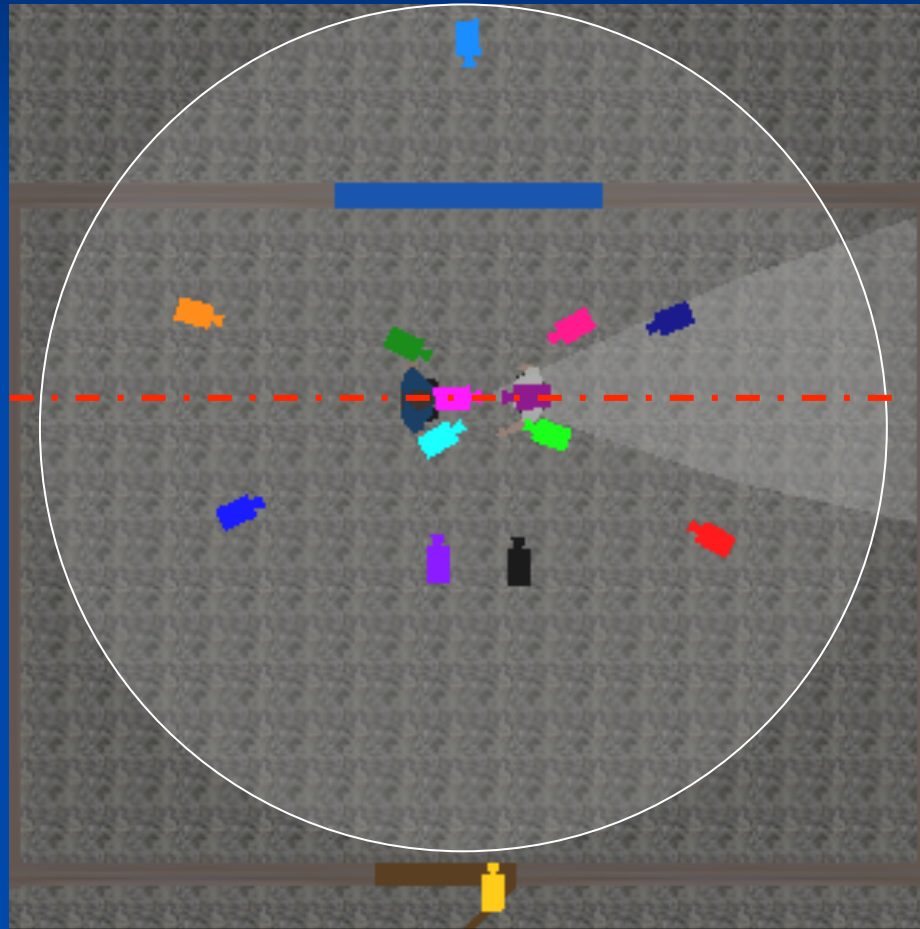
- In editing we are constantly creating QUESTIONS and giving ANSWERS to these questions
- Each shot, each scene, each episode ... must move the story forward
- You must know what information to give the audience and when

Line of Action (180 degree rule)

- A key element of the continuity system is the 180 DEGREE RULE, which states that the camera must stay on only one side of the actions and objects in a scene.
- An invisible line, known as the 180 DEGREE LINE or LINE OF ACTION, runs through the space of the scene. The camera can shoot from any position within one side of that line, but it may never cross it during the cut.

The Line of Action

The Line of Action



30 degree rule

- You should move the camera at least 30 degrees between each shot.
- If you take the long shot, the medium shot and the close up from the same position the cut between these shots will be jumpy.
- Keep in mind that each shot should give some new information.
- Does the next shot show us something new?

Anchor point or attention point

- The Matrix (1999) – Andy & Lana Wachowski

Anchor point or attention point

- Human eye does not see the whole picture at once but rather „scans“ it jumping from one attention point to the other
- For smooth editing you should always know what the audience is looking at
- Keep the anchor points in the same place during the cut from one shot to another
- It is crucial in fast action sequences where anchor points of each shot must be perfectly matched so that the viewer does not miss any important detail

Anchor point or attention point

- **We pay attention to:**
- Large objects before smaller objects
- Moving objects before static objects
- Brighter objects before darker objects
- Red colour
- Objects in focus before objects out of focus

Continuity editing

- **In continuity editing all shots within a scene should be:**
 - Similar in brightness/contrast
 - Tonality and colours
 - Similar background (lines, figures and perspectives of the background)
- For continuity editing each new shot must give the viewer some new information (be different from the previous) but at the same time be a bit similar to the previous shot (something we already know)

Six rules of editing

(Murch, Walter. In the Blink of an Eye)

■ Emotion	51%
■ Story	23%
■ Rhythm	10%
■ Eye-trace (Anchor Point)	7%
■ Two-dimensional place of screen	5%
■ Three-dimensional space of action	4%

■ *Listed in the order of importance*

Six rules of editing

(Murch, Walter. In the Blink of an Eye)

■ Emotion

- what you want the audience to feel – cut must be true to the emotion of the moment (ACTING)

■ Story

- advancing the story, giving new and needed information in the right time

■ Rhythm

- rhythmically right, interesting rhythm – keeping the interest

■ Eye-trace (Anchor Point)

■ Two-dimensional place of screen

- the grammar of three dimensions photographed in the two dimensional screen, 180 degree rule, 30 degree rule

■ Three-dimensional space of action

- three dimensional continuity (creating the logical feeling of special relations between the character – where is someone located in relation to others)

Walter Murch - In the Blink of an Eye.

- Blinking the eye as cutting
- Every shot has a potential cutting points like tree has branches
- The blink of an eye of the actor gives us the motivation for the cut
- Always follow the eyes when cutting dialogue

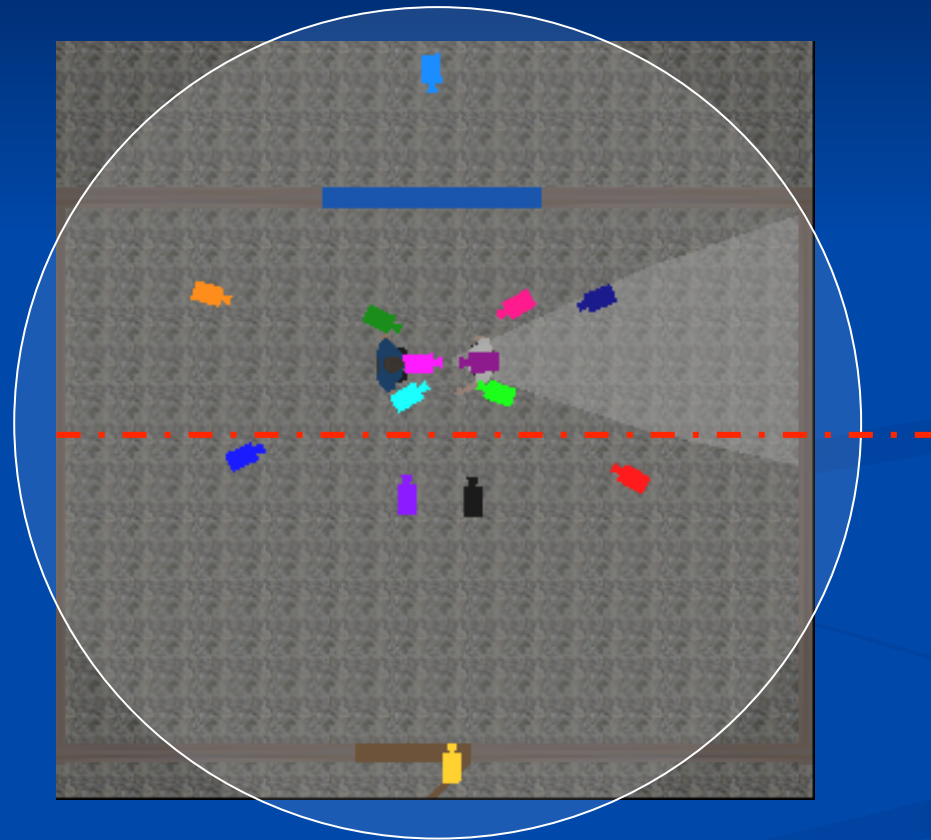
General Rule

- **Cut from static to static**
- **And from movement to movement**
 - Cutting from moving camera to static camera looks jerky

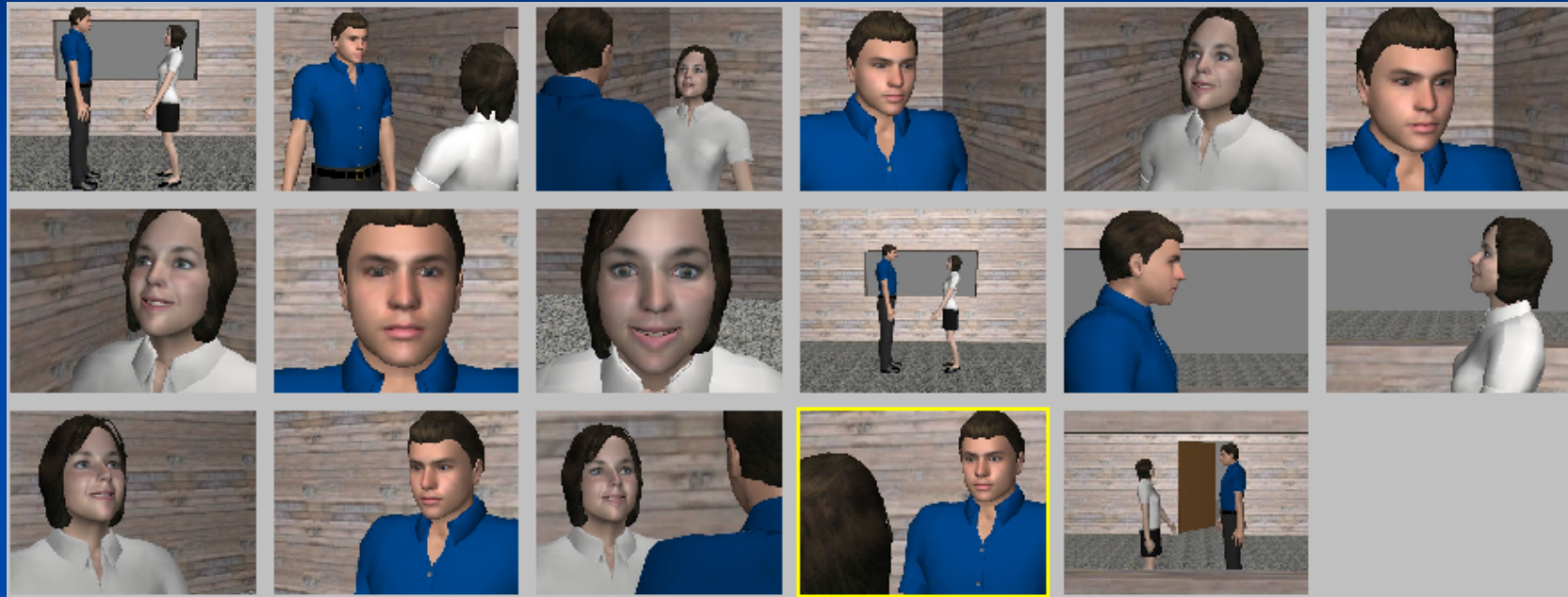
Transitions

- **Cut** – good cut is unnoticeable for the eye, juxtaposition of two ideas
- **Dissolve** – connecting two shots and two ideas
- **Slow dissolve** suggests passage of the time.
- Using dissolves with slow music gives sometimes better results than straight cuts (smoother, softer transition)
- **Fade out to black** – in the end of the day, end of episode, end of film
- **Fade in from black** – new day, morning, new theme, beginning of the film
- **Wipe transitions**
- **Iris transitions**
- **Page turns**
- etc

Basic camera setups for a dialogue



Basic camera setups for a dialogue



Editing as controlling the flow of information

- Watching film in cinema is a linear and passive process (you can not stop it or go back)
- When and for how long to show some information?
- When some detail is important then you have to SHOW IT to the viewer
- It takes more time to understand the long shot because it is more complex than a close up or detail shot. So keep long shots for longer time
- For finding the correct editing rhythm and feeling try to watch your work as an regular and fresh viewer
- Importance of **test screenings** and feedback from the audience

Editing starts from the idea and the script

- Think about how you will edit the shots together before you start the camera
(planning the locations, building the decorations, choosing the camera angles etc.)
- They say that editing gives you unlimited power to change everything
- But if there is nothing to change (correctly filmed footage) then editing will not save your project by a miracle!

Read more

- Murch, Walter. In the Blink of An Eye. 1992
- Katz, Steven D. Film Directing Shot by Shot. Michael Wise Production, 1991
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Read More

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