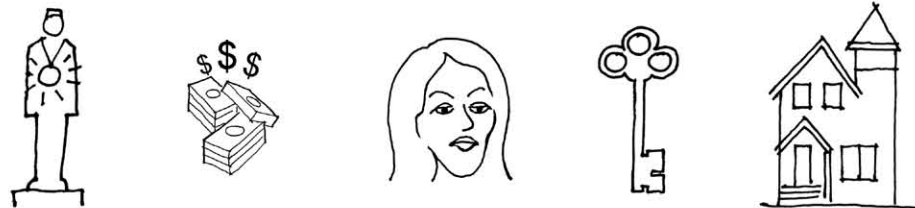


Control the back-story.

Back-story consists of events that occurred prior to the start of a film: childhood traumas, recent crises, longstanding grudges, the history of the physical setting, and much more. Back-story should be revealed obliquely through casual, but efficient, cues. A woman seen in a Chanel suit at the unemployment office will quickly bring the viewer up to date on a life that recently underwent dramatic change. A character asking "Are you still in love with him?" might tell everything one needs to know about another's romantic history. And a single on-screen event can demonstrate a long-term pattern: A man storms out on his wife in the midst of an argument, and she hurls a high-heeled shoe at him. The shoe hits the door, and a dozen heel marks are seen on the door as it slams shut.

When having difficulty developing or resolving a narrative, look to the back-story, as poor back-story exposition can shadow an entire film.



Create tangible objects of desire.

A protagonist's goals can be initially abstract, but must become more concrete as the story unfolds. Make goals visual, tangible, and active: proving one's innocence, vanquishing the villain, solving a mystery, acquiring an object or piece of knowledge, producing an event, acquiring an award.

A *MacGuffin*—a term popularized by Alfred Hitchcock—is a specific goal deemed important by the characters early on but that turns out to be irrelevant or worthless to the larger cause.



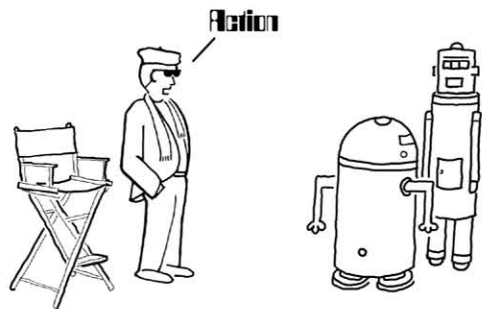
Plot



Story

***Plot* is physical events; *story* is emotional events.**

Plot is what happens in a movie; story is how the characters feel about what happens. In *The Dark Knight*, the plot sets good guy against bad guy, as Batman seeks to protect Gotham City from the deranged Joker. But the story of *The Dark Knight* is the moral crisis Batman faces in risking his reputation for a greater good.



Call “Action” in the mood of the scene.

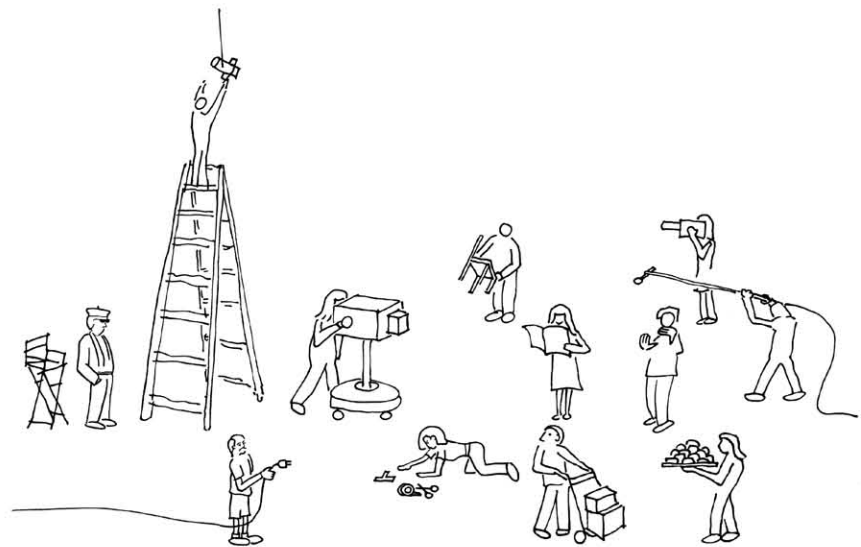
It takes time and effort for actors to discover and inhabit the desired mood of a scene. If a scene is to be quietly intense, a director can help by whispering “Action” in a soft but firm tone. If a frenetic brawl is to be filmed, he might shout it out like an umpire.

Sometimes the slate clapped at the beginning of a scene presents potential for distraction. The director might call instead for “end sticks,” meaning that the slate will be clapped at the end.



Place figures in uncomfortable proximity.

In Western cultures, the personal space between two persons in face-to-face dialogue is typically over two feet. Onscreen, this distance will usually look too wide, as viewers will become aware of the void in the middle of the frame.



Make sure everyone is making the same movie.

A movie requires not only an artistic vision, but a practical one. Production staff need to get to the set on time, work hard, and take disciplined breaks. Staff can't work at cross purposes, and must always understand the bigger picture into which their work fits. Where interpretation is called for, it must be performed within the context of a larger vision. If this vision has not been explicitly defined, don't assume it's okay to do whatever you want; instead, look for the bigger theme, story, or reason your work answers to.