



SAMPLE LESSON TWO

Conflict

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WRITING DRAMA FOR TELEVISION

BBC
MAESTRO

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**Personalised conflict
is an important step
in creating drama**

12. Set-ups & Natural Story

NATURAL STORY

When writing your pilot, you will want an inciting incident that will have a profound effect on your main characters. Something that will throw their world into chaos, that will propel them forward and cause them to set goals, make a plan. And this will have what is called 'natural story'.

In the real world, if a crime is committed, we understand that society has mechanisms in place to investigate it. We are aware of a number of things that will happen. This is what natural story is.

The audience has an understanding of this from their own experience and from watching other TV dramas. The purpose of the set-up is to carry the audience to the point at which they understand sufficient complications will ensue based on natural story, natural consequences, which will fire their imagination.

They must understand that what follows won't be simple. It will be complicated enough to offer entertainment. It will contain surprises and thought-provoking events, drawing them in and propelling them through the first episode.

CLEAR & IMPACTFUL

The set-up is hugely important in establishing the premise of the series and shaping your idea. It's essential to your pilot script.

The writers and the audience want a clear and impactful set-up. You have the inciting incident affecting the main characters, who may form a plan and come in contact with an antagonist. All these elements give you a jumping-off point for imagining a series of complications, future conflicts and confrontations that will need to be resolved.

This is the fundamental promise of the story. This is how it appeals to people. And this is why it is so crucial to get the beginning – the set-up – right.

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We can't see all the twists and turns that are coming, but we understand that they are up ahead.

INCITING INCIDENTS

Crucial to the set-up, the inciting incident is the major event that triggers the story, brings together the characters and the main themes.

Your inciting incident must be the optimum fit for the genre, the characters and the story. It is unsatisfying if it bears no relationship to what happens later on, if it's just an exciting action sequence that ultimately isn't relevant.

In **Bodyguard** the inciting incident casts a long shadow across the series. We keep returning to complications that have their origins in that event.

It may be tempting to construct a bravura action sequence in which you see how your protagonist is cool and heroic, and then move on with the real story. But that isn't anywhere near as optimised as a sequence that creates a whole number of propulsive events that have repercussions throughout the episode and the series.

CONNECTEDNESS

Events have to influence other events. Characters have to affect other characters.

In science we have a term for this – Feedback Loops.

There are two kinds:

Positive Feedback: one character does something that spurs our protagonist to do the same – join the struggle perhaps. Or an event causes our protagonist to gain more determination or power.

Negative Feedback: the action of an antagonist may interrupt the plan of our protagonist. If our protagonist is a policeman for example, they might lose their job, meaning they can no longer investigate the crime.

Positive feedback moments can then be enhanced by more positive feedback moments, so you get a virtuous loop of events that leads to a high point. Or you just as easily get a vicious loop of negative feedback that leads to a low point.

There is no model for how you tackle this. It's entirely your choice how you order, or combine, the positives and negatives. What matters is logic, coherence, and driving the story and characters forward in an interesting way. You will be influenced by the real world, other TV, things you've read about structure theory. When writing your script, some of it will feel right, and some won't. You should go with your instincts.

YOU ARE IN COMMAND

The natural story is a series of events that, we know, will have consequences.

A big fight, a court case, a quest – any number of complications, confrontations and conflicts that lead to a climax that you create.

You are in command. You are the captain.

The aeroplane has to take off – This is the set-up.

It has to fly to its destination – These are the conflicts.

And it has to land – This is the resolution.



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