

TWO-ACT STRUCTURE

¹Mr. Arshveer, ²Mr. Rahul Tiwari

¹Student ²Assistant Professor

¹School of Performing Arts, Sanjeev Agrawal Global Educational University, Bhopal

²School of Performing Arts, Sanjeev Agrawal Global Educational University, Bhopal, India

Abstract : Generally, most of the SCREENPLAYS of movies are written in “three-act structure”; there are many more structures like “four-act structure” and “five-act structure.” Some filmmakers also use the “seven-Act structure,” like Jonathan Nolan and Christopher Nolan in “The Dark Knight” and “Inception” and Quentin Tarantino in “Once upon a Time in Hollywood.”

But the two-act structure is very rarely used in screenplays. Films and shows like “Attack On Titan,” by **Hajime Isayama**, “Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood,” by **Hiroshi Onogi**, and “Death Note” by **Tsugumi Ohba** follow the two-act structure.

However, in recent times, filmmakers also started using this because audiences have short attention spans these days. Two- act structure is used by screenwriters in long short films or mini feature films.

The main purpose of this paper is to find the core difference between the classical three-act structure and the two-act structure and why Western films follow the two-act structure, while most of the filmmakers follow the three-act structure.

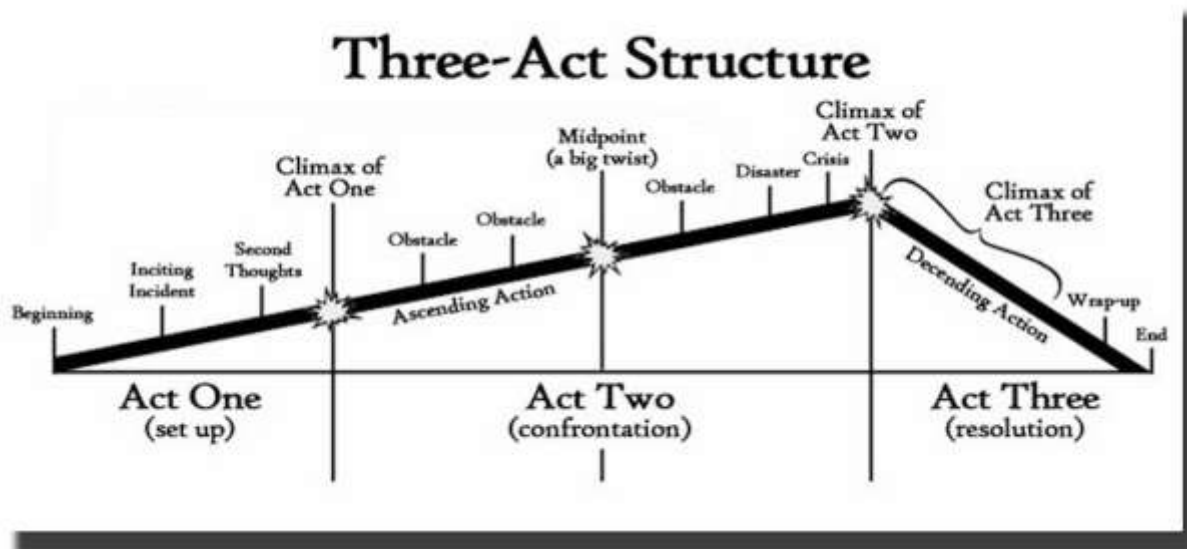
INTRODUCTION INTRODUCTION :

The 2-act structure was used in “Greek Drama” and “Japanese Plays.” At that time, plays were divided into two parts: the first one was simple and lighthearted and set up the story and characters of the play, and the second part contained obstacles, conflict, climax, and resolution.

So, 2-act structure is basically divided into two parts: the first is called act one, and the second is act two. It follows the Rise and Fall theory. The first part is usually up and up, and then the second part falls toward the climax.

Some intellectuals also said that 2-act structure is a relative framework that is used in storytelling, screenplays, and playwriting.

Here is chart of classic 3-ACT STRUCTURE —



Here is 2-ACT STRUCTURE — ACT ONE;

1. **Introducing the main character and his world (SET UP)**
2. **Inciting Incident**
3. **Obstacles and Conflicts**
4. **Midpoint and twist**

ACT TWO;

1. **Rising the stakes**
2. **Climax**
3. **Resolution**

In this way, the 2-act structure is different from the 3-act structure. The 2-act structure directly focuses on the setup and then the climax and resolution, but the classic 3-act structure works in three acts. Act One, called SETUP, it contains the beginning, the inciting incident, and second thoughts. Act Two, which is known as "Confrontation," occurs with obstacles, conflicts, ascending action, and a midpoint (a big plot twist), and Act Three, "Resolution," contains the climax.

In 2-Act Structure, the conflict is central, and the climax is more hyped, impactful, and emotional as compared to 3-Act Structure because this structure is more focused on the central character, and in this, we start building up the climax after act one ends, but in 3-Act Structure, the climax starts after the ending of act two.

As per above discussion, we can clearly see the scope and development of 2-Act structure, but there are also some limitations to this;

- **We can't create a qualitative midpoint.**
- **Sometimes it lacks climax.**
- **We also witness rushed resolution.**
- **Difficult to create non-linear and complex storylines/screenplays, etc.**

So, this research paper sheds light on aims, findings, and objectives. This also includes classical definitions, literature review, research methodology, and analytic review.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Two-act structure— It is a very rare topic to discuss. I rarely found interviews of some writers and a few articles that are worth reading, and movies, they are below—

KAREL SEGERS'S DEFINITION:

I believe the 2-act structure is a simple, appealing way of looking at the character's journey both in terms of plot and theme.

This approach recognizes what some people call the 'inner journey' and the 'outer journey' in one simple, integrated model.

There is no need to throw out whatever structural tools you have been using up to this point, but perhaps this sheds a new, fresh light on how stories for the screen are structure from a bird's-eye perspective

FILMS;

(Impact of Hollywood on film writing/screenplay structures)

Films and shows like “**Attack On Titan**,” “**Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood**,” “**Code Geass**,” and “**Death Note**” follow the two-act structure.

On a world scale and at the box office, most of the commercial hits and popular movies are from Hollywood, and mostly Hollywood filmmakers are using three structures, and we can't deny the fact that Hollywood films have inspired a lot of filmmakers in other countries. So all those filmmakers are also following the three-act structure.

However, very few Western films follow the 2-act structure. Most of the animated shows are based on a 2-act structure.

The film “**Dracula**” by “**Bram Stoker**”

This film is one of the best examples of 2-act structure. In Act One, Jonathan Harker realizes the existence of Draculas and comes to England, where all other characters start believing that Draculas are real.

And, in Act Two, the protagonist starts an investigation to find Dracula's hiding place, and he finds him. Now they are no longer trapped in England, and Dracula is hunting them. Infact Dracula is now trapped in England, and they are hunting him.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The methodological approach helps us to examine the application and the efficacy of the two-act structure in screenplay writing. The screenplay analysis involves an understanding of both philosophical and creative perspectives, or a mixed approach of primarily qualitative but also including quantitative elements to identify patterns can be adopted. This shows us that two-act structure is expressed in behavior and what impact it has on screenwriting techniques.

In this way, we can see that the two-act structure makes it possible to integrate both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer research questions effectively. Even “Structural Mapping” is also effective in two-act structure.

Here is **Data Collection Methods**;

. The detailed analytic protocol can be developed for every screenplay by examining it. This protocol may include the followings;

1. QUANTITATIVE MEASURES:

. **Total film length.**

. **Total script page count.**

. **Act break** (Length of each act);

A. Page count and runtime of Act One.

B. Page count and runtime of Act Two.

2. QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTORS:

This includes Character, plot, and theme to describe each act;

- Character Arc and Development
- Plot Progression
- Narrative Pacing
- Midpoint/Catalyst
- Rising Action and Escalation
- Climax
- Resolution

3. STRUCTURAL MAPPING:

This includes creating visual or textual representations that clearly show both the Acts and their events/turning points;

- Linear Timeline
- Screenplay Page-Count Diagram
- Beat Sheet
- Flowchart or diagram of narrative progression

With these three Quantitative measures, Qualitative descriptors, and Structural mapping techniques, it provide a clear vision and analysis of the two-act structure's methodology.

ANALYSIS/RESULTS:

The identically executed two-act structure films displayed a unique narrative style. In two-act structure, Act One is longer than the Act One of three-act structure.

Act one served as a lengthy setup. The protagonist's journey in his first act was filled with internal and external challenges leading to an irreversible decision. The midpoint also adds in this act, which is not simply a plot point but often a profound change, the crossing of a boundary, or a dramatic change that fundamentally redefines the protagonist's goals or the stakes involved.

After this strong setup, the second act begins and takes us to the central conflict. The stakes get higher, each sequence building directly upon the previous one without the obvious structural breathing space provided by a classical three-act setup.

Then, the climax was placed at the end of the second act to serve as the peak of the central conflict, and just then the resolution was introduced or added in the final moments, providing a quick conclusion rather than a long-drawn ending compared to the three-act structure. This structure often created a sense of increased urgency and a more intense experience in the original conflict.

There are many reason that Three-act structure is more famous and useful around the world;

- **Historical reason:**

As we know, Aristotelian dramatic principles are three-act structures that contain a beginning, middle, and end. It gives history in storytelling across the culture. It is the default framework for understanding narrative.

- **Academic Dominance:**

The three-act structure is the most common, adapted, and accepted screenwriting tool in film schools, workshops, and industry manuals all around the world.

For example: Joseph Campbell's "The Hero's Journey," Sid Field and Robert McKinney also talked more about three-act structure, which aligns with this common language among writers, producers, and executives.

- **Commercial Aspect:**

For commercial film production which includes financial investment, follow an already running approval method which reduces their risk. Three-act structure is considered a reliable blueprint for the production of widely marketable and critically satisfying stories.

CONCLUSION:

As we have witnessed above, the two-act structure has many beneficial techniques for screenplay writing. We can engage the audience with this structure, especially in the present era, where the attention span of the audience is decreasing day by day due to social media and short-format content. If we use this structure, it can grab the audience's attention.

However, mostly filmmakers around the world are using three-act structure; exceptions are always there. Some filmmakers also make films with other structures, and few of them are portraying the two-act structure. But in commercializing the three-act structure, there is a strong historical background. We can see three-act structure has been used since the time of Aristotle, which gives strong influence on film schools and film education. If someone is starting screenwriting these days. There is a high probability that the three-act structure is

one of the first things they will learn or study because it is so common. Even now, common people also know about it.

The aim of this research paper is not to prove two-act structure better than other structures nor to portray three-act structure as a weak structure. I just want to say that whatever attention we have given to three-act structure. Even some part of it should be given to all the other structures as well. I just want to say to writers, specially for newcomers, that you should write your story in different structures or just for practice. You should write one story in each structure. By this, you will find the best structure for you and your stories, and you'll also find your different approach.

