**1. Opening Image [Page 1]**

Start strong with an image that catapults your audience into the look and feel of your story. Blake Snyder suggests knocking this out on your first page. Look no further than Instagram account @Finalscreens to see how much story can be conveyed in the first and final images of a film.

​Film structure can be summarized in strong opening and final images.

Let’s use the act breakdown of The Matrix to show the power of the Save the Cat beat sheet template at work. To start, The Matrix boasts a strong opening image: a blinking command line cursor. The Save the Cat beat sheet template calls for an opening image that speaks volumes, The Matrix (1999)

The film is about a hacker named Neo (Keanu Reeves) who realizes his life is a computer-simulated reality (The Matrix). Seeing this blinking cursor predicts “how deep the rabbit hole” of technology will go for him. Over the image we hear Trinity and Cypher, on the “other end” of the cursor. They’re liberated from The Matrix, and looking for their savior (Neo).

ALSO:

*Opening Image* – A visual that represents the struggle & tone of the story. A snapshot of the main character’s problem, before the adventure begins. (2 scenes)

**2. Theme Stated [Page 5]**

Film structure requires that the theme of the film is communicated by someone fairly early on. Commonly, this is dialogue spoken to the protagonist that he doesn’t quite grasp yet.

In The Matrix, Neo moonlights as a creator of illegal software. One of his customers tells him that he looks like he “needs to unplug for awhile.” This very subtly suggests that Neo will learn to unplug from his computer simulated reality, and how to fight those who were keeping him there.

ALSO:

*Theme Stated* (happens during the Set-up) – What your story is about; the message, the truth. Usually, it is spoken to the main character or in their presence, but they don’t understand the truth…not until they have some personal experience and context to support it. (2 scenes)

**3. Set-up [Pages 1-10]**

Use your first ten pages wisely. Here, you’ll need to establish your story scope (and “look and feel”) for the audience.

First, show your character in their “old world.” Let the audience know what the status quo is for them, then hint at the adventure that will follow.

Second, establish all characters who will factor into your main story beats. This may take some creativity. Sometimes, for story reasons, you will just have to hint at those characters.

The Matrix cleverly begins with an action sequence to establish how there are people in Neo’s world (Trinity, the Agents) who seem like they’re from another place. They defy the laws of physics, and seem to come and go as they please. The Matrix beat sheet example finds strong world-building in its set-up, The Matrix (1999)

We also meet Neo, and learn that he senses this other world, but it’s just beyond his grasp.

ALSO:

*Set-up* – Expand on the “before” snapshot. Present the main character’s world as it is, and what is missing in their life. (2 scenes)

**4. Catalyst [Page 12]**

Sometimes called the “inciting incident,” the catalyst is the event that disrupts your protagonist’s status quo. But they’re not ready to make the choice that catapults them into the story just yet. In The Matrix, this happens when Neo meets Trinity in a club. She tells him that he’s in danger.

ALSO:

*Catalyst* – The moment where life as it is changes. It is the telegram, the act of catching your loved-one cheating, allowing a monster onboard the ship, meeting the true love of your life, etc. The “before” world is no more, change is underway. (1 scene)

**5. Debate [Page 12-25]**

This is where the protagonist is in doubt about setting out on their perilous journey.

Think about it like the major stressor of moving to a new place. You may know it’s bigger, or closer to work, but making the choice to pack your things and do it is still rough. How does this beat manifest in The Marix?

After talking to Trinity, Neo finds himself hunted by sunglasses-wearing “suits” (the Agents). Thankfully, he’s on the phone with Morpheus - the leader of the rebellion Trinity represents. However, Neo’s not strong enough follow through on Morpheus’ orders to escape his office building.

In Joseph Campbell this is called the refusal of the call.

ALSO:

*Debate* – But change is scary and for a moment, or a brief number of moments, the main character doubts the journey they must take. Can I face this challenge? Do I have what it takes? Should I go at all? It is the last chance for the hero to chicken out. (6 scenes)

**6. Break into Two [Page 25]**

Inevitably, your protagonist will overcome his or her doubt and make a choice to set out on their adventure. This choice is what sets the plot in motion.

From here on out, your Save the Cat beat sheet template will be filled with obstacles and twists resulting from making this choice.

In The Matrix?

You guessed it: this is where Neo takes the Blue Pill (to unplug from The Matrix) over the red pill (to resume status quo).

What is a beat that can catapult your story into its story? The Matrix (1999)

ALSO:

*Break Into Two* (Choosing Act Two) – The main character makes a choice and the journey begins. We leave the “Thesis” world and enter the upside-down, opposite world of Act Two. (2 scenes)

**7. B Story [Page 30]**

The A story revolves around the choice your protagonist made as Act 1 breaks into Act 2. But another subplot ensues, commonly a love story. Blake Snyder suggests this at around Page 30, and that it illustrates the theme of your film.

The Matrix does not conform to this succinctly (remember, the Save the Cat beat sheet template only gives you suggested page counts).

The B Story is the blossoming romance between Neo and Trinity. It starts when they meet in the club, and blossoms once Neo has left the Matrix and is aboard the Nebuchadnezzar with Morpheus and his crew. Trinity gives Neo strength to believe that he’s their savior (AKA “The One”).

ALSO:

*B Story* – This is when there’s a discussion about the Theme – the nugget of truth. Usually, this discussion is between the main character and the love interest. So, the B Story is usually called the “love story”. (1 scene)

**8. Fun and Games [Page 30-35]**

Thankfully, the Save the Cat beat sheet template is not “all work and no play.”

Don’t worry, the Save the Cat beat sheet template allows for some play, The Shining

Your plot structure requires a stretch where your protagonist wields their new power, and does cool stuff with it.

In The Matrix, Neo enters a virtual program (The Construct), where Morpheus teaches him all kinds of fun stuff.

Here he starts to hone martial arts skills and how to jump really high.

ALSO:

*The Promise of the Premise* (fun & games) – This is when Craig Thompson’s relationship with Raina blooms, when Indiana Jones tries to beat the Nazis to the Lost Ark, when the detective finds the most clues and dodges the most bullets. This is when the main character explores the new world and the audience is entertained by the premise they have been promised. (13 scenes)

**9. Midpoint [Page 55]**

At some point, your protagonist will either get what they’re after... or not. But there will be consequences either way.

Neo takes the blue pill to see if he’s truly the humanity’s savior. But, at the midpoint, he goes to the clairvoyant Oracle to see if this is true. She give him a once-over and, tragically, tells him it's not true.

ALSO:

*Midpoint* – Dependent upon the story, this moment is when everything is “great” or everything is “awful”. The main character either gets everything they think they want (“great”) or doesn’t get what they think they want at all (“awful”). But not everything we think we want is what we actually need in the end. (1 scene)

**10. Bad Guys Close In [Pages 55-75]**

After your protagonist gets what they want, or not, there will be consequences. These forces will tighten their grasp, and throw the protagonist off balance. These forces don’t necessarily have to be bad guys. It can also be infighting within the protagonist’s circle, for example.

Back to The Matrix. This is the section where Cypher betrays the team and allows the Agents to capture Morpheus. This thwarts the team’s relative control amongst chaos.

ALSO:

*Bad Guys Close In* – Doubt, jealousy, fear, foes both physical and emotional regroup to defeat the main character’s goal, and the main character’s “great”/“awful” situation disintegrates. (10 scenes)

**11. All Is Lost [Page 75]**

In film structure, the dire circumstances your protagonist endures will lead to an inevitable loss. This is usually a character, and classically the “mentor” (think Obi-Wan, Gandalf and Morpheus). Whatever the loss, it’s felt deeply because this item (or person) gave the protagonist their bearings.

In The Matrix, this is where Morpheus is kidnapped, and the location of Zion -- humanity’s last save haven -- is compromised.

ALSO:

*All is Lost* – The opposite moment from the Midpoint: “awful”/“great”. The moment that the main character realizes they’ve lost everything they gained, or everything they now have has no meaning. The initial goal now looks even more impossible than before. And here, something or someone dies. It can be physical or emotional, but the death of something old makes way for something new to be born. (1 scene)

**12. Dark Night of the Soul [Pages 75-85]**

This is the most dire circumstance your character reaches. At this point of the Save the Cat beat sheet template, your protagonist has lost hope.

In The Matrix, this is where Neo and his team come to the tragic realization that they have to pull the plug on Morpheus. Otherwise, the Agents might thwart humanity forever.

Your plot structure relies on a moment where everything feels hopeless, The Matrix

ALSO:

*Dark Night of the Soul* – The main character hits bottom, and wallows in hopelessness. The Why hast thou forsaken me, Lord? moment. Mourning the loss of what has “died” – the dream, the goal, the mentor character, the love of your life, etc. But, you must fall completely before you can pick yourself back up and try again. (4 scenes)

**13. Break into Three [Page 85]**

Like a forest fire, loss and misery are followed by new life. In plot structure, this is where your protagonist claws around in the darkness, only to find or remember something useful.

In The Matrix, Neo is reminded of some crucial information he gleaned from the Oracle. This gives him the confidence to take arms and save Morpheus from The Agents, against impossible odds. Trinity goes with him.

ALSO:

*Break Into Three* (Choosing Act Three) – Thanks to a fresh idea, new inspiration, or last-minute Thematic advice from the B Story (usually the love interest), the main character chooses to try again. (1 scene)

**14. Finale [Pages 85-110]**

Treat the finale as the Act 3 summary. The Save the Cat beat sheet template is at its end, so it’s time for the protagonist to take on their foes. Armed with new tools and self-discoveries, the protagonist often synthesizes what they've learned (in Act 2) with values they've always had (Act 1).

In The Matrix, Neo and Trinity put their training to the ultimate test to take on the Agents and liberate Morpheus. Eventually, Neo has to face the lead Agent by himself. He channels a feeling he always had, even when inside The Matrix. He “unplugs” from the Oracle’s logic and follows these feelings, which give him godlike powers in The Matrix.

He’s indeed The One, and subdues The Agents.

ALSO:

*Finale* – This time around, the main character incorporates the Theme – the nugget of truth that now makes sense to them – into their fight for the goal because they have experience from the A Story and context from the B Story. Act Three is about Synthesis! (13 scenes)

**15. Final Image [Page 110]**

Along with the opening image, the final image creates the bookend that encapsulates the journey. It’s the last thing the audience sees, and should cement the theme of the film, as well as represent what happened and changed over the course of this journey.

The Matrix, closes on Neo. We hear his voiceover talk about the next steps of liberating these humans stuck in The Matrix. Then he takes flight! Being The One has endowed him with superhero qualities in The Matrix, which he will now put to use.

ALSO:

*Final Image* – opposite of Opening Image, proving, visually, that a change has occurred within the character. THE END (1 scene)