



THE DRAMATIC PREMISE

A good way to be sure your script will have solid dramatic structure is to write a *dramatic premise*. Evolving from the theme statement, the premise is a tool that you can use to state the logical progress of your story in clear, simple terms. While the theme statement shows the human needs, wants, desires, and behavior that motivate your characters, the premise shows how their dramatic action drives your plot. The easy way to write a dramatic premise is to use three simple sentences:

- Line 1 sums up your primary disordering event, the crisis that launches your plot. The goal sentence of your theme statement is a logical and strong foundation for this line.
- Line 2 sums up the Act One turning point, the “hook” that launches Act Two. It sharpens the conflict, builds tension, and propels the characters and story into Act Two.
- Line 3 sums up the Act Two turning point, the “hook” that launches Act Three. It shows the strongest complication the protagonist will face.



STORYTELLING VERSUS STORY-DOING

At an early age, we begin to love the storyteller’s art, listening as our parents, teachers, and camp counselors describe intriguing characters and exciting events. We begin to write narrative prose in grade school, using words to explain and describe everything. We acquire a vocabulary of adjectives and adverbs. (Words that describe and explain words.) When we become interested in screenwriting, we hear, “You must be a good storyteller.” Thinking we know all about that, we tackle our scripts and submit them eagerly. But they come back with notes that say, “This reads like a novel. Show. Don’t tell.” We’re left to scratch our heads in dismay.

Okay. Here’s an illustration:

STORYTELLING: She reaches with her right hand, grasping her opponent’s left arm, raising her right leg sharply so her right foot connects with his left upper thigh.

STORY-DOING: She grabs him and kicks him in the groin.

See the difference? Novice dramatists often make their characters describe and explain events when instead the characters should be doing action. To get out of storytelling mode and into story **DOING** means changing the way we think when we write.

To that end, however, I must steer you through the perilous straits of *backstory*. So, students, raise your right hands and repeat after me, “On my honor, I will do my best to begin with a disordering event.” Because a good, strong disordering event is your key to success.