The creative process of writing is the same regardless of the medium—whether the writer is working on a book, a play or a screenplay. However, there are important differences in the technical process of writing for a visual medium like film. Perhaps most important, the writer must be able to think in visual terms—he or she must be able to show what is happening. Syd Field, author of several books on screenwriting, describes a screenplay as being “like a noun—it’s about a person, or persons, in a place or places, doing his or her or their ‘thing.’” In a screenplay, the story is told with pictures, and it follows a very definite form. Like a play, the screenplay unfolds in acts: In act one the writer sets up the story. Act two contains the conflict—the basis of any drama. According to Field, “All drama is conflict. Without conflict you have no character; without character, you have no action; without action, you have no story; and without story, you have no screenplay.” Finally, act three provides some kind of resolution. Some writers begin their work by writing the ideas for their scenes on index cards. Others begin with an outline. Still others start with a treatment—a narrative synopsis of what happens in the story. Regardless of format, each approach takes into consideration character descriptions, central story conflicts and key plot points. A plot point is an incident or event that ties into the action in the first act of the film and connects it to act two. Another plot point occurs at the end of the second act, and connects it to act three.

There are two kinds of screenplays—those that are developed specifically for film (an original screenplay), and those that are adapted for film from another published work (an adapted screenplay). Adaptations are original works in themselves, but they begin with the previously published material as their source. Adapting a work can be a challenge because the writer must not only create a story that is compelling in its own right, but he or she also must remain true to the original story.

**Three Act Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act</th>
<th>End Act (⅓ of script)</th>
<th>Middle Act (½ of script)</th>
<th>Beginning Act (¼ of script)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>Resolution/Climax</td>
<td>Complication/Conflict</td>
<td>Setup</td>
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<td>Denouement</td>
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<td>Exposition</td>
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**Plot Points**

1. Climax
2. Denouement
3. Rising Action
4. Falling Action
5. Exposition
Chapter 3b vocabulary

✓ exposition: introduces characters, shows relationships, places them in believable time and place
✓ complication: conflict begins; grows in clarity, intensity, and importance
✓ climax: point at which complication reaches maximum tension and forces in opposition confront each other at the peak of physical/emotional action
✓ dénouement: brief period of calm after climax; state of relative equilibrium returns
✓ in medias res: "in the middle of things;" story begins after the complication has developed
✓ flashback: sequence that goes back in time to provide expository material; use must be dramatic and effective
✓ external conflict: struggle between central character and another character or force such as fate, society, or nature
✓ internal conflict: psychological conflict within the central character (personality)
✓ foils: contrasting characters whose behavior, attitudes, opinions, lifestyles, physical appearance, are opposites; defines personalities
✓ caricature: exaggeration of one or more personality traits
✓ leitmotif: repetition of phrase/ideas by a character until it becomes a trademark
✓ name typing: use of names (sound, meaning, connotation) to help describe a character
✓ stock characters: minor characters; actions predictable or typical of their profession
✓ stereotypes: characters that fit into preconceived patterns of behavior or to represent a large number of people
✓ static characters: characters who remain essentially the same; action is not important to their lives or insensitive to the meaning of the action
✓ developing characters: (dynamic characters) deeply affected by the action of the plot, undergo change in personality, attitude, or outlook on life
✓ flat characters: predictable characters
✓ round characters/three dimensional characters: unique and individualistic, complex and ambiguous; cannot be easily categorized