THE SCENE BUILDING BLUEPRINT

DAVID VILLALVA

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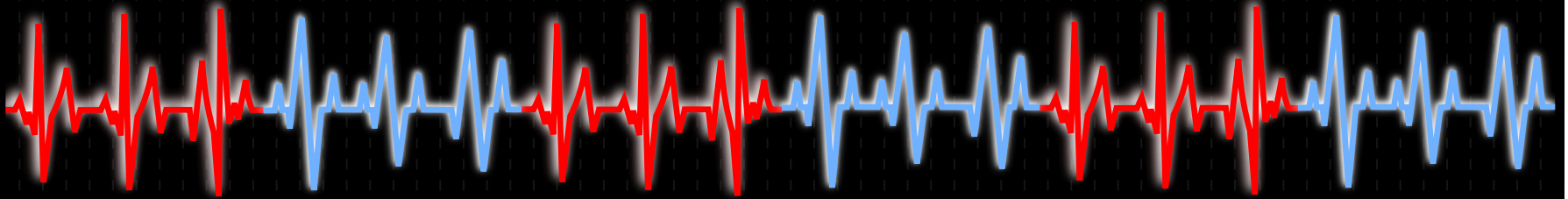
Well-designed stories have a heartbeat to them. A rhythm. A pulse.

This visual guide was created to show you that pulse by illustrating how to build and connect **SCENES*** into a story that moves audiences.

* **SCENE** (*noun*): A unit of action or a segment of a story.

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SECTION 1: THE STORY PULSE

THE STORY PULSE paces audiences as they consume your overarching storyline. This **SECTION** will showcase the two **SCENE** types found in most narratives. Also, each **SCENE** should focus on just one character's point of view (POV).

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MISSION SCENE   a.k.a.   CAUSE

- Quickens pace using a constant flow of action that moves a POV character toward an immediate objective connected to the overarching storyline

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SECTION 1: THE STORY PULSE

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MISSION

a.k.a. Goal

- Character wants to achieve a clear short-term MISSION

- Establishing this Goal showcases the character as proactive & gives audiences something to root for

- Audiences will connect with driven, focused characters

Beginning

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OPPOSITION

a.k.a. **Conflict**

- Character meets obstacles in pursuit of desired **MISSION**

- Meeting **Conflict** forces the character to stay active & jeopardizes the **GOAL** which helps audiences stay engaged

- Audiences don't want things to be easy for characters

Middle

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SETBACK
a.k.a. **Disaster**

- Character suffers a **SETBACK** before completing the **MISSION**

- This **Disaster** compels the character to persevere & hooks audiences to turn the page into a **RESPONSE SCENE**

- Audiences get bored when characters always succeed

End

SECTION 1: THE STORY PULSE

RESPONSE SCENE a.k.a. EFFECT

- Controls pace so POV character can process the **SETBACK**, commit to the next **MISSION** & continue moving across the overarching storyline

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a.k.a. **Reaction**

- Character faces emotional **RESPONSE** after **SETBACK**

- Character's **Reaction** emotes imbalance, shock, endurance, anger, wonder, uncertainty, concern, etc

- Audiences can identify with genuine & imperfect reactions

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Beginning

STRUGGLE

a.k.a. **Dilemma**

- Character must **STRUGGLE** due to no good options

- Character navigates the **Dilemma** by sorting through all the choices & scrutinizing the different paths to advance

- Audiences love to worry about what happens next

Middle

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COMMITMENT

a.k.a. **Decision**

- Character chooses how to keep moving forward

- Character commits to the best possible **Decision** which launches character into another **MISSION SCENE**

- Audiences want believable and entertaining choices

Beginning	Middle	End

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SECTION 2: THE STORY PULSE SUMMARY

MISSION SCENE			RESPONSE SCENE		
a.k.a. **CAUSE**			a.k.a. **EFFECT**		
• Quickens pace using action that moves the POV Character toward an immediate **MISSION**			• Controls pace so POV Character can process the **SETBACK** & determine best way to begin next **MISSION**		
MISSION	**OPPOSITION**	**SETBACK**	**RESPONSE**	**STRUGGLE**	**COMMITMENT**
a.k.a.	a.k.a.	a.k.a.	a.k.a.	a.k.a.	a.k.a.
Goal	**Conflict**	**Disaster**	**Reaction**	**Dilemma**	**Decision**
• Character wants to achieve one clear short-term **MISSION**	• Character encounters obstacles while trying to achieve the **MISSION**	• Character suffers a **Disaster** just before completing the **MISSION**	• Character experiences a realistic **Reaction** due to the **SETBACK**	• Character struggles with how to advance due to no good options	• Character chooses best way to move forward & begin next **MISSION**
Beginning	Middle	End	Beginning	Middle	End

SECTION 2: THE STORY PULSE SUMMARY

So that's scene structure. You write a **MISSION SCENE** which brings purpose to the following **RESPONSE SCENE** which leads into a new **MISSION SCENE**. And so on… **THE STORY PULSE** creates a **CAUSE** and **EFFECT** pattern that connects **SCENES** into a story that moves audiences and characters.

And despite the example below,
one **SCENE** must not always equal one chapter in fiction.

| MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPO |
| Ch. 1 | Ch. 2 | Ch. 3 | Ch. 4 | Ch. 5 | Ch. 6 | Ch. 7 | Ch. 8 | Ch. 9 | Ch. 10 | Ch. 11 | Ch. 12 | Ch. 13 | Ch. 14 | Ch. 15 | Ch. 16 | Ch. 17 | Ch. 18 | Ch. 19 | Ch. 2 |

In the next **SECTION**, we'll explore more variables in **THE STORY PULSE**.

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SECTION 3: THE PULSE IN THE BIG PICTURE

While **THE STORY PULSE** is the heartbeat of your story, your overarching storyline is also known as **THE BIG PICTURE** inside **THE STORYTELLING BLUEPRINT**.

THE BIG PICTURE features four evolving **PART**s including seven plot milestones that drive audiences from a plot's *Beginning* to *End*.
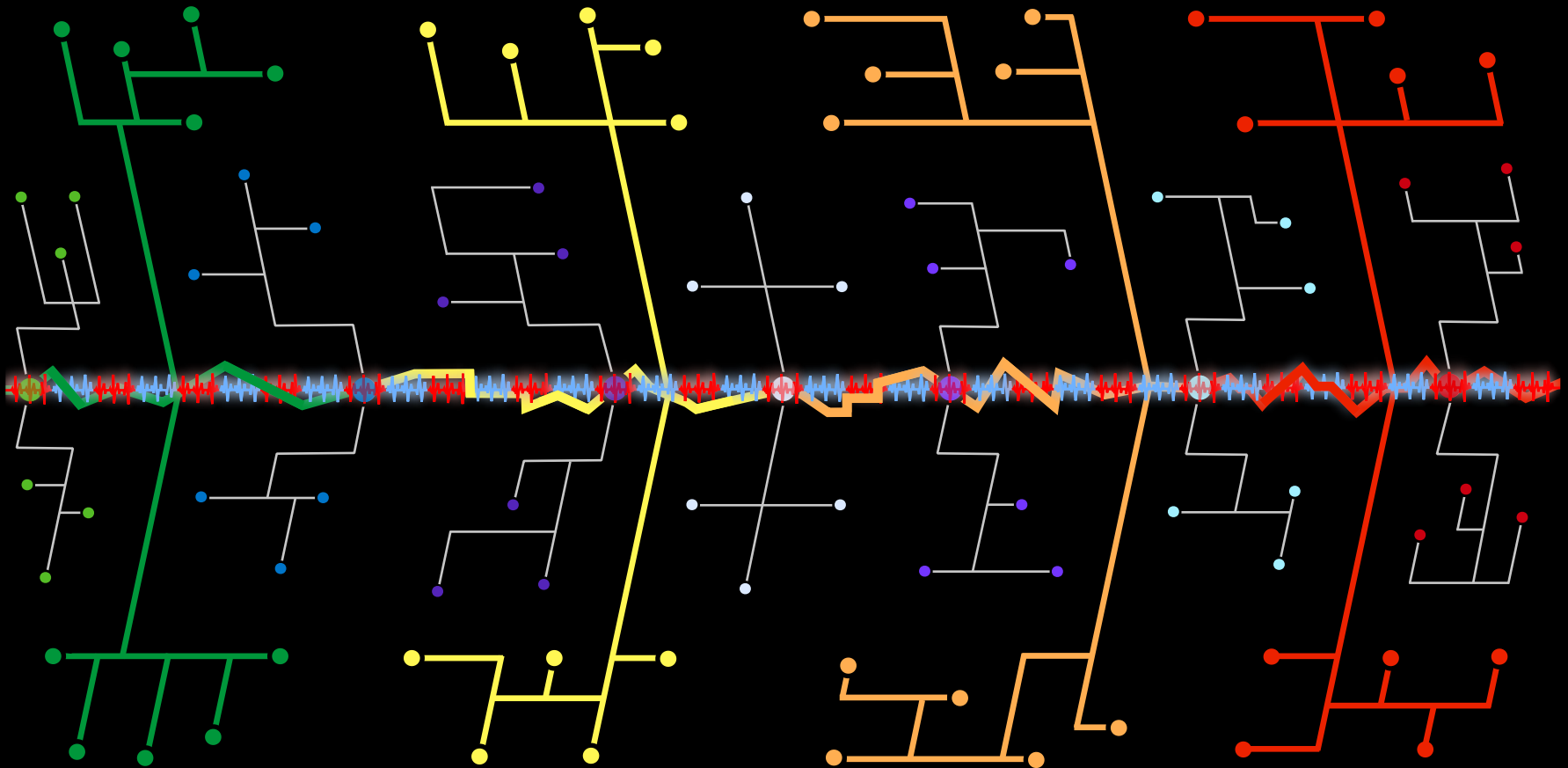
Now let's take a quick look at how **THE STORY PULSE** intertwines within ACT I and the first half of ACT II of **THE BIG PICTURE**. Please understand the percentages illustrated in this **SECTION** are flexible, but storytellers should respect the proven structure as much as possible.
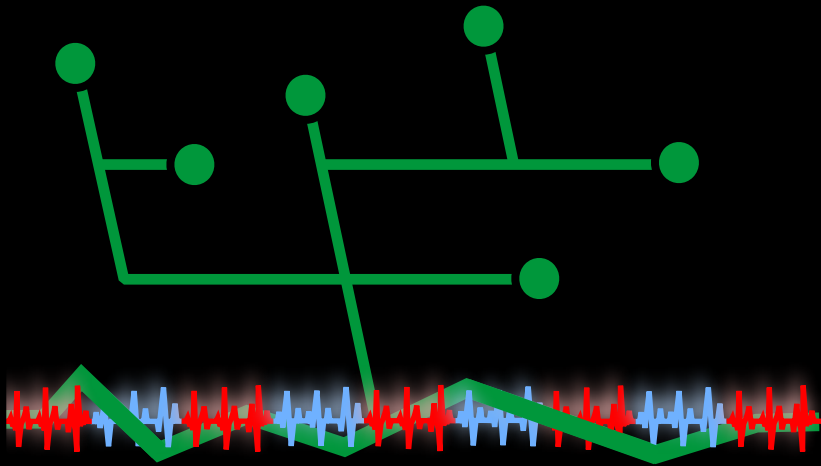
SECTION 3: THE PULSE IN THE BIG PICTURE

Each **PART** of **THE BIG PICTURE** does not require a set number of **SCENES**. The **MISSION** and **RESPONSE SCENE** images in this **SECTION** are strictly examples. Use word/page counts or runtime to determine your storyline's percentages.

PART 1 (ACT I)

STATUS QUO a.k.a. Setup:

- Establishes Characters, Setting & Stakes
- Ramps us scenes toward the Protagonist's **STORY GOAL LAUNCH** which drives overarching story

Beginning ⟶ *25%*

MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION
Sc. 1	Sc. 2	Sc. 3	Sc. 4	Sc. 5	Sc. 6	Sc. 7	Sc. 8	Sc. 9

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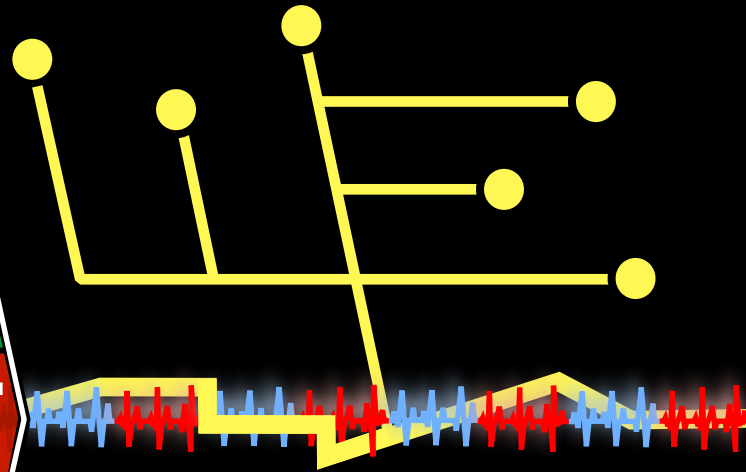
SECTION 3: THE PULSE IN THE BIG PICTURE

While each of the four **PART**s do not require a set number of **SCENE**s, each of the four **PART**s should be somewhat close to equivalent in page or word counts. However, each **PART** will usually end with a **MISSION SCENE** as shown below because your most significant story events are typically **MISSION SCENES**.

PART 1 (ACT I)

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| Sc. 1 | Sc. 2 | Sc. 3 | Sc. 4 | Sc. 5 | Sc. 6 | Sc. 7 | Sc. 8 | Sc. 9 |

PART 2 (first half of ACT II)

REACTIVITY a.k.a. Caution:

- Protagonist responds to the launched **STORY GOAL**
- Scenes consist of Protagonist seeking help, regrouping, learning, processing new info, etc

26% ⟶ 50%

| RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION | RESPONSE | MISSION |
| Sc. 10 | Sc. 11 | Sc. 12 | Sc. 13 | Sc. 14 | Sc. 15 | Sc. 16 | Sc. 17 |

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SECTION 3: THE PULSE IN THE BIG PICTURE

And your most significant story events are your seven plot milestones.
That means the plot milestones are usually incorporated into
MISSION SCENEs because **MISSION**s typically generate the
most impact on audiences (specifically, the **SETBACK**).

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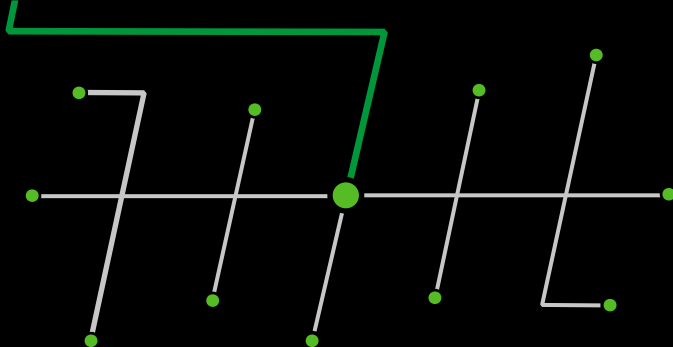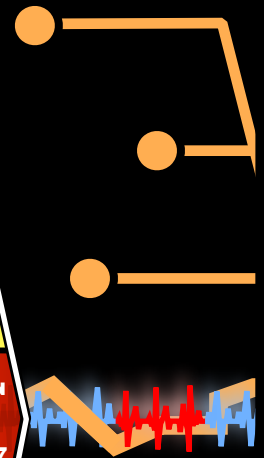
Beginning → 25%

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PA

PROACT

- Protagonist cha
- Scenes shov
  vital to comp

51%

MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE
1%	Sc. 2	Sc. 3	Sc. 4	Sc. 5	Sc. 6	Sc. 7	Sc. 8	25%	Sc. 10	Sc. 11	Sc. 12	Sc. 13	Sc. 14	Sc. 15	Sc. 16	Sc. 17	Sc. 18	Sc. 19	Sc. 2

SEIZE

a.k.a. **Hook:**

- Scene that captures attention by raising an intriguing
  question by creating curiosity, surprise,
  urgency, conflict, passion, etc
- **SEIZE** is typically the first scene in a story

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SECTION 4: THE PULSE IN THE BIG PICTURE

Last, your **STORY GOAL** **LAUNCH** serves as the *most* important plot milestone because every **SCENE** in **PART 1**'s **STATUS QUO** sets up the **STORY GOAL** **LAUNCH**. And every **SCENE** in ACT II and ACT III (including the remaining plot milestones) will progressively resolve that **STORY GOAL**.

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Beginning ⟶ 25%

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- Protagonist cha...
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51%

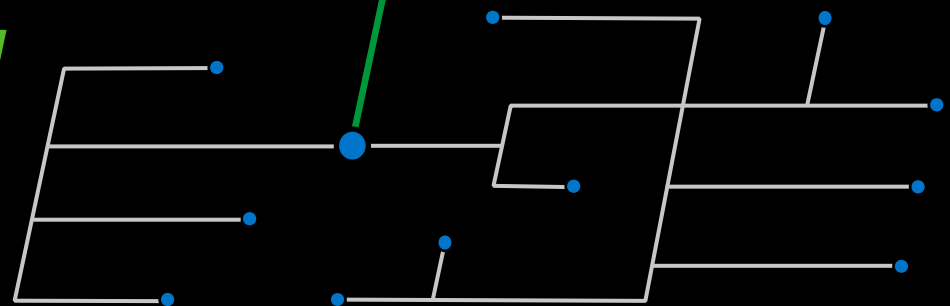| MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE	MISSION	RESPONSE
1%	Sc. 2	Sc. 3	Sc. 4	Sc. 5	Sc. 6	Sc. 7	Sc. 8	25%	Sc. 10	Sc. 11	Sc. 12	Sc. 13	Sc. 14	Sc. 15	Sc. 16	Sc. 17	Sc. 18	Sc. 19	Sc. 2

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STORY GOAL LAUNCH

a.k.a. 1st Plot Point:

- Scene that initiates an overarching plot journey when the Protagonist's **STATUS QUO** is disrupted, forcing the Protagonist into **PART 2**'s **REACTIVITY**
- The **STORY GOAL** **LAUNCH** scene must be unmistakable to audiences because it drives the focus of your overarching plotline throughout **PARTs 2, 3 & 4**

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WHAT TO DO NEXT

1. Look for **THE STORY PULSE** in every narrative you devour moving forward including novels, comic books, movies, television shows, etc.

2. Write. Practice the craft! But write with **THE STORY PULSE** in mind because you can use its scene pattern to outline a plot or finish a draft by the seat of your pants.

3. This visual guide referenced elements from **THE STORYTELLING BLUEPRINT**, so access that guide as needed to ensure you understand how the pieces fit.

** Also, do you know any friends who you think could benefit from this new **BLUEPRINT**? If so, feel free to share this visual guide because you might be helping them create the story they've always wanted to write…

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THANKS TO THE GREATS

This visual guide based on scene structure exists because of the master storytellers who served as my virtual mentors so I'd like to thank them.

First, thanks to Dwight V. Swain for *Techniques of the Selling Writer*.
He wrote a classic and his Scene & Sequel legacy lives on.

Next, thanks to Randy Ingermanson for *Writing Fiction for Dummies*
and for your blog articles which simplified scene structure.

And thanks to Jack M. Bickham for *Scene & Structure*. His
book provided a deeper dive and left its own legacy.

Last, thanks to every storyteller who shares their work
with the world. You showcase how stories
and our craft can impact lives.

Thank you,

David Villalva
Lucid Storyteller

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