

# The Hero's Journey

The hero's journey is an ancient concept, but the idea of seeing a similar pattern of that journey belongs to the unparalleled scholar of folklore, Joseph Campbell -- a pattern he refers to as the "monomyth." In *Hero With a Thousand Faces* and other works, Dr. Campbell outlines the central stages of the hero's journey from initiation to fulfillment. This is a somewhat streamlined version of the hero's journey below.

## Stages of the Journey

NOTE: Not all of these stages may be present in a given work.

### Stage 1 - The Hero's Birth/Home

Often, the hero appears to be born miraculously (e.g., a virgin or divine birth) but of humble origins before he or she leaves the "common world" to enter the world of adventure.

### Stage 2 - The Call to Adventure

This is the "inciting incident" or catalyst for the hero to leave her or his home and engage in adventure. Sometimes he or she leaves home reluctantly, other times willingly. Often, a cataclysmic event will force the hero on his or her journey and test his or her abilities.

### Stage 3 - Crossing the Threshold

In this stage, the hero moves from the normal world to the world of adventure. This might be a dramatic incident (such as when Jonah enters the belly of the whale) or a less dramatic event (such as when the hobbits cross into the Old Forest).

### Stage 4 - Tests

The hero will undergo a series of tests which will test his or her readiness and teach him or her the ways of the hero. The antagonists/enemies can be pretty much anything -- magical figures, warriors, natural events, or temptations.

### Stage 5 - Helpers

The hero will often be helped by a companion or supernatural figure who aids him in making decisions. In the story "Vasilisa the Brave," the heroine Vasilisa is helped by a magical doll given to her by her mother before she died. Luke Skywalker is helped by a series of wise companions or teachers, including

Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda.

### **Stage 6 - The Big Battle and Descent into the Underworld.**

This is often a literal battle, though it can also be a final test or a battle of wits. In this stage, the hero battles the enemy, monster, warrior, or antagonist, and this fight brings about the resolution of the story. The battle often takes place in the Underworld, the Dark Place of the story where the hero confronts her or his fears.

### **Stage 7 - The Trip Back**

When the battle is over, the hero must return to the ordinary world with the magical power, the token, the knowledge, the prize, or the reward for her or his efforts. The power or token was referred to by James Frazer as the "golden bough" from the underworld, but it can take many forms. Sometimes this part of the journey is done hastily (if, for instance, the "golden bough" was stolen). In "Jack and the Beanstalk," Jack's return to the normal world after his theft of the golden harp from the Ogre's castle is done in extreme haste, for example.

### **Stage 8 - The Return**

The hero makes the return transition out of the world of adventure and back to the ordinary world. This can be as simple as emerging from the enchanted forest or can be more complex, as when Bilbo comes back to Hobbiton to find that his house and possessions are being sold off.

### **Stage 9 - Using the Elixir**

The hero now applies or uses the elixir, the golden bough, the sacred fire, the knowledge, or the prize she or he has acquired on the journey. The application of the elixir saves the king, the country, the people, or improves the lives of others. This stage represents the fulfillment of the journey.

## **Other Hero's Journey Sites**

[The Monomyth](#)- A nice site with an overview of the major stages of the hero's journey

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## Tiger Woods Needs To Tell A Hero's Tale

Robbie Vorhaus | Dec 1, 2009 2:02 PM EST

### Comments (127)

Tiger Woods needs to tell a hero's tale.

By his silence, Tiger Woods is breaking every rule in PR, crisis communications and reputation management, allowing his story to swirl around in the media ether, fueled by tales of speculation, and whipped into frenzy by anyone with a platform or soapbox.

But more importantly, he's forgetting that for millions of people around the world, he is their real life hero, a champion of mythical proportions. And unlike reality shooting stars and 15-minute celebrities,

Tiger Woods became a hero role because of his persistence, talent, and consistent achievements, something we all aspire to.

Our purpose, the reason we are born, is to experience a joyful life through the expression of what fills our heart. We want to believe that if we follow our internal calling, we can achieve greatness. Tiger Woods did it, so can we.

So now what's Tiger Woods to do? How can he redeem himself, regardless of the current situation?

Tiger Woods needs to tell a hero's story. To our collective soul, a good hero's story well told is both redemptive and healing.

In this story, our hero is a young, incredibly gifted, very rich African American golfer and self proclaimed Buddhist. He's married to a white former Swedish model and together are raising two beautiful children.

And then *it* happens. For the hero, there's always an "it," the "Call to Adventure," as the late mythologist, Joseph Campbell, calls it; an inciting incident where the hero is presented with a situation he or she can't ignore. Colliding with a fire hydrant and tree in the dark, early morning hours outside your home is a good example. Add in the intrigue of the wife's role - is she a villain or life saver? - and you've got a really good story.

The next plot point on the hero's path is usually where he or she refuses to acknowledge the present situation, hoping it will all just go away. Campbell calls this "The Refusal of the Call," and by Tiger Woods issuing a terse, cryptic, vapid press statement, along with refusing to speak with police authorities, and then not appearing at his own golf tournament, tracks perfectly for this story.

Also in the beginning of a hero's story he or she connects with a mentor, usually someone old and wise, who helps our hero navigate the perils of the approaching extraordinary, uncharted world. But wait, in Tiger's story the mentor, Tiger Wood's father, Earl, died just over three years



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21st June 2009, 03:08

#1



**Scriverener**   
 Scriverener is ancient  
 Gold Member

Join Date: Feb 2008  
 Posts: 579

[Inciting Incident](#)

### The Inciting Incident

Ok, let's pose the question, 'Where do you place the inciting incident?' and find a path to an answer.

What does everyone agree on? The inciting incident occurs somewhere in Act One.

At some point in Act One, your Protagonist has got to be propelled into the story and the world of the story.

Act Two sees the protagonist in the world of the story and he or she had to move out of their normal world to get into the story world proper. So a believable rift in the protagonist's universe is needed to kick start the process - something the protagonist HAS to react to.

The problem I see time and again is a weak inciting incident and an implausible reaction to it. The

writer's reaction is usually that it worked in such and such a movie so that is where it had to go in the writer's script. This is the place that new writers kill someone of such importance to the protagonist that the protagonist is effectively physically or emotionally orphaned.

That may work, of course, but what should happen is that whatever the inciting incident it must be something he or she is not expecting. Something completely out of left field - BUT perfectly congruent with the story.

So where should it go to fire up the interest of a modern movie audience (and a reader)? Probably page 15 is too late. However, that is not a rule.

It will come AFTER you have

- \* Set up the tone of your story i.e., romantic comedy, detective, horror, sci-fi, thriller - whatever.
- \* Introduced the protagonist or the Antagonist or Stakes character (a victim of the Antagonist).
- \* Set up enough of the protagonist's Ordinary World for us to 'get it'.
- \* Established enough of the protagonist's character to intimate the 'fatal flaw'.

Then you can spring your Inciting Incident - somewhere between page 8 and page 15 in your first draft. You can always rewrite it later (in the second draft or rewrite of the first draft) and spring the whole lot in a killer opening scene on page one. But only when you have a finished first draft and know from the story that your rewrite will allow that.

Only break the rules when you know the rules.

The way it works is that the inciting incident must be a 'signifier' of sufficient and plausible gravity that it will result in the protagonist eventually making the decision to leave the safety of their ordinary world. That decision is NOT the Inciting Incident. The Inciting Incident comes before and results in the decision - usually after considerable and plausible reluctance (both considerable and plausible). The protagonist will try to find every excuse possible in the context of the story not to leave that ordinary world. So the inciting incident has a very big job to do - but it can be as simple as a phone call or as major as coming back home or to the office to find everyone is dead - provided that you have set it up in the first 8 to 12 pages. Think *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Three Days of the Condor*. There might even be a perpetrator still in the building (No, Not Elvis!). But eventually, the protagonist makes the decision to take the journey to resolve whatever conflict the inciting incident just caused. That last sentence is critical - it means that the inciting incident is connected directly to rest of the story.

What comes before the Inciting Incident in the ordinary 'safe' world and what comes after in the journey 'new rules of operating' world are connected.

You will often see a claim that the inciting incident should be an unexpected banana peel your protagonist slips on. He didn't see it coming and neither did we. It's that drive-by that happens for no reason. It's an event that makes no sense. Be wary of that execution of the Inciting Incident. It has to fit the story world and the story and make sense. However it really has to be something plausible that will eventually succeed in getting the protagonist well and truly on the journey of the story.

Different screenwriting paradigms use the term Inciting Incident - or its equivalent, in different ways. (I am almost certain that the Stephen Greenfield is the original source of the following paradigm comparisons I have added the odd note here and there - Syd Field, Robert McKee, John Truby, Christopher Vogler and Dramatica).

### **The Syd Field Paradigm.**

Field's Paradigm is a four-act structure masquerading as a three-act structure. It starts with a set-up and inciting incident, has regular turning points in the plot called "plot points" and "pinches" in the middles, and ends with a climax and resolution. His paradigm describes both the external journey involving the attempt to achieve the story goal and the internal journey of the Main Character. Syd Field is adamant that dramatic structure is a series of related incidents leading to a dramatic resolution. The inciting incident is only one of these related series of incidents. He

suggests that you have 30 pages to set up the story. He puts a 'plot point' hook at about page 25 to 27 which seems to be his Inciting Incident.

### **Robert McKee's Central Plot and The Quest**

McKee describes plot in two ways. The first is a simple linear timeline called the Central Plot. McKee's Central Plot is a modified three-act structure. It begins with an inciting incident, proceeds with progressive complications, and ends with a crisis, climax, and resolution. McKee's system uses beats to build scenes, scenes to build sequences, and sequences to build acts. His third act is slightly shorter than the last act in the four-act structure examples. The McKee second act picks up the extra time and is slightly longer than the combined middle acts of a four-act structure.

The second approach McKee uses is called The Quest.

The Quest describes the flow of conflict in a story. The + and — represent the positive and negative tug-of-war of conflict in the backstory before the inciting incident. The "spine" represents the "through-line" / timeline in the story. The conscious and unconscious desires describe the drive behind the external and internal journeys. The inner, personal, and extra-personal conflicts represent the types of pressure put to bear on the protagonist/main character as the story progresses. The conscious and unconscious objects of desire represent the journeys' goals.

### **John Truby's Twenty-Two Building Blocks**

A combination of Joseph Campbell's mythic structure and original work, Truby's Twenty-Two Building Blocks plot structure loosely conforms to a three-act structure. Truby is a proponent of the idea that Plot is what Character does, and Character is defined by actions. As such, his plotline is a combination of a Hero's actions motivated by his internal Need and an external Desire (goal). The actions of various Opponents and Allies counterpoint the Hero's efforts. The plot has an inciting incident, ends with a new equilibrium, and has several revelations and reversals along the way.

Let's give the next to last word to John Truby. He says there are Four Necessities that are key tools early in the writing process. They are, briefly: The NEED, the INCITING INCIDENT, the DESIRE, and the OPPONENT – and each of these four elements must be intimately and necessarily connected to the others for your story to work as well as it can.

**NEED:** what the character needs to fulfil them and create a good life. They will not fulfil this need until the end of the story. It is usually unconscious, and until they fix this aspect of themselves they're acting immorally / hurting someone / hurting society by their actions.

The necessary **DESIRE LINE** is the one that will eventually cause your hero to address his **NEED** when he realises he cannot get what he wants by remaining who he was. It also guarantees your hero runs smack into his **OPPONENT**.

The **INCITING INCIDENT** is the thing early in the story that upsets your hero's world and causes them to come up with a goal. Again, you have to find the necessary Inciting Incident. This is the singular event that creates the conditions for the hero to create their **DESIRE LINE** towards the goal (which eventually causes your hero to confront his **NEED** if he is to succeed).

The necessary **OPPONENT** is the one person in the whole world who is best able to attack the hero's main weaknesses (and ultimately confront his **NEED**). He is also competing for the same goal (otherwise everyone could get what they want and the story would be over). Tying the Opponent tightly together with the **INCITING INCIDENT** often (but not always) results in stories in which the Opponent is subsequently discovered to be the cause of the Inciting Incident.

### **Christopher Vogler's Hero's Journey**

Christopher Vogler's description of the Hero's Journey plot is usually presented as a circle. Like Syd Field's Paradigm, Vogler's Hero's Journey is a four-act structure camouflaged as a three-act structure. That's where the similarity ends. Based on Joseph Campbell's work on mythic story structure, Vogler has relabeled the plot points to describe the external journey of the Hero, and the internal journey of the main character (The Character Arc). Vogler's setup and inciting event take the form of Ordinary World and Call to Adventure. Like Field and other paradigms to come, major events function as turning points for the acts, such as Crossing the Threshold into the Special World, Ordeal, and The Road Back to the Ordinary World. Crisis and climax show up as Resurrection

and Final Attempt. Return with the Elixir and Mastery approximate the story's resolution.

### **Michael Hauge's Six Stage Plot Structure**

Despite its name, Hauge's Six Stage Plot Structure has its roots in a four-act structure. It starts with a setup followed by an inciting incident called Turning Point #1: Opportunity. It has regular turning points in the plot to indicate act breaks (Turning Points #2, #3, & #4), and ends with a climax (Turning Point #5) and resolution (Aftermath). Hauge's paradigm describes the Outer Journey as the attempt to achieve the story goal. The Inner Journey describes how the Hero (Main Character) goes from living fully within his Identity (a mask that hides his inner trauma and desires) to a life free of the Identity and fulfilling his Destiny.

### **Dramatica's "Act Structure"**

Dramatica clearly uses a four-act structure. It starts with a setup of plot points and story dynamics and an inciting incident. It has regular turning points in the plot to indicate act breaks driven by the Story Driver, and ends with a crisis, climax, and resolution of plot points and story dynamics. It also explores four throughlines; two more than the other story paradigms. The Overall Story throughline is the rough equivalent of the outer journey found in other paradigms. The Main Character throughline is the counterpart to the inner journey. Dramatica counterpoints the Main Character throughline with the Impact Character throughline. Exploring the relationship between the Main and Impact Characters is done in the MC/IC Relationship throughline.

and the one I really like:

### **Phil Gladwin -**

In the course of a normal day for them they take their usual steps to tackle their familiar problem when something unusual happens, and creates a new need for them to solve this Unusual Problem. (This need usually takes the shape of a question in their head.) They should pretty well drop else everything they are doing at this point, and work on answering this question. After a bit of a struggle they get to a point where they get their answers, or they get their need satisfied, only to find out that in accomplishing this they have opened up a whole new, and much, much bigger problem. This is the end of Act 1.

Let's break that down into what's needed. You have to:

1. Show us your Hero, show us what kind of a person they are, and their normal everyday life.
2. Show us how they have a Familiar Problem.
3. Show them taking steps to solve their Familiar Problem.
4. Show how, somewhere along the line, they will encounter an unusual event which produces their Unusual Problem.
5. This unusual event is called the Inciting Incident. It can be the tiniest thing, but it should have the potential to turn the Protagonist's life upside down, and to create a situation that will last till the end of the screenplay. When you are looking for this incident, you need to find the event that will eventually lead your hero into the most difficult struggle of their life.

### **Contour - Jeffrey Schechter**

ACT I / Plot Points 4 - 5

In these two plot points of Act One, several landmarks occur:

The inciting incident will occur. This is the event that will rock the hero's world and change things forever.

The hero has an increased awareness of his or her inner needs.

The stakes are made clear. This is what the hero stands to lose.

The proverbial call to adventure occurs or is alluded to. The hero is summoned or made aware that he or she may need to leave the ordinary world but either doesn't acknowledge or refuses to answer the call. Yet!

Finally, **Ronald Tobias** sets out his argument in approximately the following steps:

Based on the book "20 Master Plots (And How to Build Them)" by Ronald B. Tobias. ISBN 0-89879-595-8.

Sort of reworked to show the three act structure.

#### Act 1 (or Phase 1) – Setup

The protagonist is shown before the change.

The incident that prompts a crisis, and thus the change, is presented. This is called the initial transforming incident, or inciting incident.

The first effects on the protagonist of the incident unfold. Tobias cautions the author to keep to action and reaction, and cause and effect.

(It is also important to foreshadow the transformation, showing there are lessons to be learned or insights to be made, etc.)

#### Act 2 (or Phase 2) – Complications

This act shows the “full effects of the transforming incident.” As this is a process plot, the process of transformation is developed by degrees.

Being a character plot, self-examination is used greatly. From the book: “Whatever actions the character takes are a direct expression of what the character thinks. The character’s nature determines the action...”

#### Act 3 (or Phase 3) – Climax and resolution

This act shows the incident that defines the outcome of the change (final transforming incident or clarifying incident).

Tobias mentions that in this act, it is common for the protagonist to have learned a lesson, or learned a lesson other than what he thought he would learn (where illusion is replaced by reality).

He also is usually a bit sadder but wiser.

Growth and understanding occur.

Tobias comments that a character should be “primed” for an event to affect him (the inciting incident). Tobias was discussing the disproportionate impact of a mistaken kiss on a Chekhov character. Had he not been “primed” (given proper description of his psychology and actions illustrating it), then the extreme impact would have fallen flat. Tobias identifies an incident that starts a change in the protagonist's life. Be sure the reader knows who the protagonist is before the change!

Now let the ripples of the incident begin to stretch out...“There are lessons to be learned, judgments to be made, insights to be seen.”

Then show us the full effects of the transforming inciting incident.

What hidden parts of the main character are stirred up in the wake of the storm?

Then show us (often via another incident) the results of the transformation. What does the protagonist (and the reader) learn?

“It's common for a protagonist to learn lessons other than what he expected to learn.

The real lessons are often the hidden or unexpected ones. Expectations are baffled; illusions are destroyed. Reality overtakes fantasy,” says Tobias.

Now the task of suggesting page numbers. Remember that the Inciting Incident CAN occur on page 1 or page 21 or anywhere in Act One. But the usual rule of thumb is that an inciting incident is not just a single banana peel event. There are five connected Inciting Incident related plot points throughout the movie (Truby - if I remember rightly).

I've added examples from Little Miss Sunshine

**INCITING INCIDENT** The first critical dynamic in the script is the "Inciting Incident". This is the point in which the "hero" encounters some thing, force or person that shakes his everyday/normal world up and sets him on the path to adventure. This point usually comes around 10-15 minutes into the movie.

*Inciting Incident (Aunt Cindy calls)*

**END OF ACT ONE** The next structural point in the movie comes when the hero is fully thrust into the "special world". This is considered to be the end of Act One. Often, the hero will attempt to refuse this "call to adventure" before fully accepting the task before him. This point usually comes around 25-30 minutes into the movie.

*First Act Break (Olive promises Richard she will win the contest then Richard hits the table and says "We're going to Florida")*

**MIDPOINT/CONFRONTATION** The next structural point is considered to be the major point of confrontation. This is when the hero fully confronts the forces that are against him. Here the battle is on and the two opposing forces go at each other and the hero usually comes out the loser. This point usually comes around 55 - 65 minutes into the movie.

*Mid Point Setback (Grandpa dies - but his values win through at the end through the hero's decision)*

*Second Act Reversal - reveal a much bigger problem than the getting to Florida (They discover that all the other contestants are more polished and more talented than Olive - big insight - there is no way Olive can win this contest)*

**END OF ACT TWO** This structural point will often be the lowest point in the movie. It is the point where all looks lost and in some case the hero will actually appear to die physically. This point usually comes around 70- 80 minutes into the movie.

*Second Act Break (They get to Florida - fulfils the second act goal - which was to get to Florida and register Olive - they get to Florida and register Olive)*

**END OF ACT THREE / DENOUEMENT** This structural point takes place at the conclusion of the movie. It is here that the hero finally triumphs or accepts his losses (in a tragedy). Any loose ends still left will be tied up here. This point usually comes in the last 15 minutes of the movie. Now the big question - can the hero go back to things as they were in the hero's ordinary world BEFORE the Inciting Incident occurred? This is where you write your magic moment insight and audience satisfaction. Aahhhhh!

So, to return to the initial question, Where does the Inciting Incident go?

The best way I can state it is that readers and producers often leaf through pages 8 to 15 looking for the Inciting Incident - even before they have read the opening.

Probably a good place to put it.

Hope this helps.

But there is more. Is the Inciting Incident in Starwars when Luke Skywalker sees the hologram of the Princess, when he and Ben discover the dead Sandpeople, when Luke discovers his nuked aunt and uncle, or when Peter Cushing zaps the Princess' planet? Care to vote? Or better, argue?

Phil, you're not allowed to give away the answer!



*I'm a writer - I create worlds!*



21st June 2009, 03:35

#2



**Population17**  
Population17 is chastened  
Moderator

Join Date: Feb 2009  
Posts: 1,977

**Re: Inciting Incident**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Scrivener**  
Hope this helps.



Hope this helps? HOPE THIS HELPS?

Dear Lord, Scrive, you are amazing! 😊

Fantastic post!

I feel like I'm stealing a college course when I read your posts.

thank you thank you thank you

brad

In this crowded place I could swing a cat and not even hit a soul.  
It's just a lonely vacuum of human black holes.

And I'm as dry as these thirsty trees.  
With big city thoughts in the dirty breeze.  
Promising to set me free.  
Waiter, check please.



21st June 2009, 04:24

#3



**craktactor**  
craktactor is taking it as it comes.  
Gold Member

Join Date: Feb 2008  
Location: The American Southwest  
Posts: 1,513

**Re: Inciting Incident**

Thank you Scriv.  
This, of course, goes into the "Scriv" book.  
Keep it coming. This'll be the "biggest" book on the market. 🍷

And yes, you're right about Truby...  
I have "Blockbuster" and it's become not only a terrific story builder, but a "teacher" as well. It has a "Lessons" file with everything in it that's in his book. I've had this about 3 months and still haven't seen everything on it yet.  
Learning, learning and more learning.  
And thanks to you... I get taught here also.

You're a great mentor.  
We're blessed and damn lucky to have you.

-----  
*ut docere, ut delectate, ut movere...*

(to teach, to delight, to move)



21st June 2009, 04:57

#4



**Scrivener**  
Scrivener is ancient  
Gold Member

Join Date: Feb 2008  
Posts: 579

**Re: Inciting Incident**

Ok Cract - here is a challenge. Write a paragraph that points out the relationship of the Inciting Incident to the other key events and dynamics and about where he places it in our nearly favourite author, James Bonnet - *Stealing Fire From the Gods*. He calls it *Inciting Action - the Change of Fortune*.

there ya go!

And who was it that glowed over another of my top ten favourite authors, Karl Iglesias. He calls it *Inciting Event* - page 67 and 117-118 of his book.

Oh and of course Paul Guilino. He calls it both *The Point of Attack* and *Inciting Incident* - page 14 of his book.

If someone would have a decent shot at these it would be great.



*I'm a writer - I create worlds!*



21st June 2009, 05:25

#5



**LukeJames**  
LukeJames is wistful...  
Gold Member

Join Date: Mar 2009  
Location: Brisbane, Australia  
Posts: 1,916

**Re: Inciting Incident**

Scrivener, I want to put YOU in the pool room! 🎱

*Within my kind delusion lives the day we leave everything to pretend.*



21st June 2009, 05:31

#6



**craktactor**  
craktactor is taking it as it comes.  
Gold Member

Join Date: Feb 2008  
Location: The American Southwest  
Posts: 1,513

**Re: Inciting Incident**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Scrivener**  
*Ok Cract - here is a challenge. Write a paragraph that points out the relationship of the Inciting Incident to the other key events and dynamics and about where he places it in our*

*nearly favourite author, James Bonnet - Stealing Fire From the Gods. He calls it Inciting Action - the Change of Fortune.*

*there ya go!*

Ah... homework. Never been good about it, but...  
Give me time, sir. It shall be done. Hopefully tomorrow.  
Is there a grading curve?

-----  
*ut docere, ut delectate, ut movere...*  
(to teach, to delight, to move)



21st June 2009, 05:38

#7



**LukeJames**  
LukeJames is wistful...  
Gold Member

Join Date: Mar 2009  
Location: Brisbane, Australia  
Posts: 1,916

**Re: Inciting Incident**

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Scrivener**

*But there is more. Is the Inciting Incident in Starwars when Luke Skywalker sees the hologram of the Princess, when he and Ben discover the dead Sandpeople, when Luke discovers his nuked aunt and uncle, or when the Peter Cushing zaps the Princess' planet? Care to vote? Or better, argue?*

*Phil, you're not allowed to give away the answer!*



To use the Hero's Journey as Structure (though I probably blur it) ... Luke is the Hero and whatever incites his Call to Adventure is the Inciting Incident. So the hologram would be the Inciting Incident. Obiwan telling Luke he must learn the ways of the force if he has to go to Alderaan is the Call to Adventure.

*I can't go with you to Alderaan. I have work to do!*

Come on, Luke - strap on a pair... The Refusal of the Call...

But to look at it from the POV of the Opponent having the same desire (the stolen plans), couldn't Leia putting the plans in Artoo and jettisoning him and 3PO be considered the Inciting Incident? This would be the Inciting Incident of the Story rather than the Hero, you might say.

That's my two cents... as Crack might say!

*Within my kind delusion lives the day we leave everything to pretend.*



21st June 2009, 06:01

#8



**Scrivener**   
 Scrivener is ancient  
 Gold Member

Join Date: Feb 2008  
 Posts: 579

**Re: Inciting Incident**

Sorry Luke, me mum an' me are workin' on a cake raffle. Can't go. Bugger!

Now we have proof positive that the protagonist, the antagonist and the stakes character each have a story arc that has its own inciting incident - remember my exhortation to to run the beat sheets for each of these characters.

Top of the class buddy.

But I would still like to see a raging argument over this.



*I'm a writer - I create worlds!*



21st June 2009, 06:14

#9



**LukeJames**   
 LukeJames is wistful...  
 Gold Member

Join Date: Mar 2009  
 Location: Brisbane, Australia  
 Posts: 1,916

**Re: Inciting Incident**

Haha, Scriv!

Ah, top of the class... it's nice up here everyone! 

I'm glad you made the comment about the individual stories for each character. I had always been fuzzy on why exactly you needed to go into so much detail with the other characters... but I get it now... and see how useful it can (*will*) be.

On a side note, since we're talking Star Wars, would anyone believe that my little sister is named Leah!?!?! Okay, so it's not Leia... but I think it pretty darn cool just the same. Hehe! 

*Within my kind delusion lives the day we leave everything to pretend.*



21st June 2009, 06:24

#10



**Scrivener**   
 Scrivener is ancient  
 Gold Member

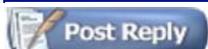
Join Date: Feb 2008  
 Posts: 579

**Re: Inciting Incident**

Bet she doesn't stick Chelsea buns over her ears though!



*I'm a writer - I create worlds!*

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## Writing Act I of Your Screenplay

Every act in the three-act structure has a set of tasks to accomplish. The first act serves as your audience's introduction to the entire world of the script — people, places, time frame, and all. Remember that your audience members begin in a neutral darkness. In their advance toward some new awareness, they're not unlike visitors in a foreign country. You need to orient them fairly quickly to the story that's about to unfold. So, the first act is all about setup.

### Your opening moments

Begin with an image. Stories that begin with anything else, voices in darkness or immediate dialogue, for instance, are often difficult to absorb. A strong opening image can convey backdrop, character, and pervading mood in seconds. That image might also convey a theme for your piece. *The Untouchables* opens with the planting of a bomb in a local establishment and its inevitable explosion. An innocent girl dies in that explosion, which quickly suggests the depth of corruption responsible for such an action. It visually pits good against evil from the start.

The eye picks up details much more quickly than the ear, and nothing's more disconcerting than staring at talking heads. In a way, you haven't earned the right to open verbally. Your audience doesn't yet know the people speaking; they haven't decided whether the characters are interesting enough to pursue. Let your audience watch your characters for a bit, assess their actions, and make some initial assumptions. Doing so keeps your audience actively involved in guessing what your story will be.

Also, everything that happens in the first moments of a film is important. If you provide vital information verbally, your audience is likely to miss it in their quest to appraise the environment visually. People come to the movies to see pictures in motion. Why begin with anything else?

### The first ten pages

If your opening image grabs the audience's attention, you have roughly ten pages after that opening to convince them that your film is worth watching. Don't believe that? The next time you go to a movie, ask yourself how you feel about it after the first ten minutes. If you're bored or confused, you'll likely deem it a failure. If you're riveted, odds are that you'll

consider it a success.

The first ten pages provide an initial criterion on which to judge the ensuing story. They should provide just enough information to establish a clear world without giving too much of the eventual plot away, and they should create enough mystery to keep the audience wondering what's in store. Your first ten pages should accomplish the following tasks:

- Introduce the main characters
- Establish the primary environments
- Convey a distinct mood or atmosphere
- Establish the time period
- Illustrate a routine or way of life
- Provide any relevant *backstory* (events that transpired before the story began)
- Introduce the antagonist

If you haven't already settled on an ending to your script, now is the time to do it. If you don't know where the script is going, how will you determine which pieces of information to highlight at the beginning?

Everything that happens now is a setup for what comes next. So you have to know what comes next.

Some films reveal the antagonist as the villain right away. The opening text of *The Untouchables* delineates Al Capone as the film's key scoundrel. The shark in *Jaws* consumes its first victim in the first five minutes. By contrast, the true murderer in *Ghost* seems to be a nice guy until well after the protagonist is killed. When you reveal the villain is up to you; you certainly don't have to do so in the first ten pages. However, make the conflict clear shortly thereafter. If you wait much longer, you risk having a restless audience that's impatient for the action to begin.

## The inciting incident

The *inciting incident*, also known as the *catalyst*, marks the film's first turning point. It tilts the story from order to chaos, from complacency to combat. It's the point of no return. In this moment, you answer two questions:

- What do your characters want?
- What might prevent them from getting it?

Together, these queries make up the film's *premise*, or what it's ultimately about. In *Lord of the Rings*, one hobbit wants to rid Middle Earth of an evil force. The Dark Lord and human greed stand in his way. In both *Ordinary People* and *Good Will Hunting*, young men struggle to forgive and forget their tortuous past. Personal demons and unsympathetic adults stand in their way. A strong premise clearly defines a need and an impediment. As soon as an audience senses these details, you can pose the central question: Will your protagonist(s) succeed?

If the answer is yes, you may have a happy ending; if it's no, a tragedy is in the works. Your inciting incident isn't complete until you pose this question. Until then, audiences wait. They wait for action; they wait for intent; they wait to be told what they're waiting for.

An inciting incident generally occurs in one of the following ways:

- An action plunges the characters into conflict.
- A piece of critical information arrives.
- A sequence of small events prepares an audience for the story.

In *Jaws*, a shark attacks a young woman, an action that begins the hunt. In *American Beauty*, Lester Burnham receives word that his job is in jeopardy, a piece of information that sends him over the edge. In the final method, the inciting incident takes the form of several events and is, therefore, the most subtle of the three. The film *Zorro* is a clear example of this technique. Two brothers witness Zorro attempting to thwart an execution. They save his life in the process, and he rewards them with a silver medallion. Government troops then invade his house, kill his wife, abduct his child, and throw him in jail. Years pass before he escapes. Meanwhile, the brothers, now grown up, also flee government soldiers. When one of them is killed, the other falls into a great depression and would risk his life avenging the death, if he wasn't first intercepted by (who else?) Zorro. All these events prepare an audience for the real story, which involves the training of a new masked hero. This preparation obviously takes longer than ten pages, but the result is the same.

## Plot point one

*Plot point one* is the first big turning point in your script. It occurs at the end of the first act, approximately 30 pages into the action, and propels an audience into Act II. It must do the following things:

- Push the action in a new direction
- Force the protagonist to make a choice and take a risk
- Raise the central question for the first or second time
- Raise the stakes

Pivotal events, like plot point one, are usually surprises. Audiences know that something grand will happen eventually. They might even know what the result of that event will be. But don't allow them to guess the details of the event itself or you'll spoil the surprise. *Star Wars* audiences know that Luke Skywalker will eventually be called away from the safety of his family and into training. They may also guess that, as a result, he will have to fight Darth Vader, but they don't know exactly how these proceedings will transpire. Stories that hint too thoroughly at upcoming events become overly predictable and less exciting to watch.

In *Zorro*, the young brother meets his future mentor. He must choose to fight the villain now or follow this instructor and heed his advice to wait. His decision tilts the plot toward the true story — the training of a legend. In *The Untouchables*, Malone joins Ness's force, and together, they enlist a team of crusaders. From that point on, it's them against Capone's small army. The first plot point may be as shocking as the death of a loved one or as gentle as the touch of a hand. Both actions have the power to launch a great story.

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**Danny** 44 minutes ago

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**Harry R. Soule** 2 months ago

Sorry, I'm in the wrong spot. I thought this was Writing a Screenplay for Geniuses.

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**B.S.** 5 months ago

@ c a n All of those people went to film school and had, at one point, learned all of this stuff. Stop trying to exclude people because you think you're special.

Reply



**liz sonia** 8 months ago



this is really good stuff....gave me tips on how to better my script....hope al get to learn even more.....BIGUPS!!!

[Like](#)[Reply](#)

**c a n** 1 year ago

What a terrible article. First of all, if you're a dummy, don't write a screenplay. Write a screenplay if you're a cineliterate expert skilled in performance writing with something to say and a good feel for the visual nature of cinema. Second - don't start a film with immediate dialogue or a voice in darkness? You mean like those creative and critical failures Pulp Fiction, Reservoir Dogs, Miller's Crossing, No Country For Old Men, The Unloved, Annie Hall, and about a thousand others? How about every Coen Brothers film there is? They almost all start with a narrator, usually a fringe character or omniscient narrator, commenting on theme. But don't do that, I mean look how unrecognised and unsuccessful they've been. What a terrible, useless, dishonest piece of writing this "article" is. Here's a clue: if you need this kind of article to help you write a screenplay, don't write a screenplay. Go and watch a lot of films that you like, do your own analysis, come to your own conclusions, compare your conclusions to the so-called rules, and ignore the "experts" (who usually have never had anything worthwhile produced) who can only back up their fake rules with examples from mediocre films. Here's a quote from Aaron Sorkin, who as you all should know is an actual expert and one of our greatest screenwriters: "People who don't know anything tend to make up fake rules, the real rules being considerably more difficult to learn".

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**Lisa** 1 year ago

This is an excerpt from the book Screenwriting for Dummies by Laura Schellhardt. It is very well written. I have other books on screenwriting. I like the format of this book. Also, things are explained and good examples are given. I got this book at a discount rate. I wasn't really looking for it. However, I have found that it has been one of the best books that I've bought. The author did a really good job.

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**T. Martin** 1 year ago

Is there a similar article for writing Act II and Act III?

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**Cody** 1 year ago



[Like](#) [Reply](#)**Stew** 2 years ago

you point the writer in the right direction, also you give a lot of key points and interesting insights. It was very helpful and i feel that i will right a multi-million dollar sceenplay this year 2009 thank you.

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)**Tyson Cain** 2 years ago

I am a creative thinker who has developed a few really good script ideas for cit-com, big screen, mini-sodes, shorts etc. I do not have any formal training in writing or producing, however I have found an opportunity to drive my ideas via a web-base broadcasting company. I am looking for help making my ideas into scripts, screenplays and eventually movies! I can not afford to pay anyone at this point but i am willing to give all credits where credits are earned. Can anyone help me?

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)**Jenks** 2 years ago

This was very helpful.

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**DAILY SCREENWRITING TIPS**

## Creating An Inciting Incident For Your Screenplay

Aspiring screenwriters are often told to create an inciting incident for their screenplay. The problem is that screenwriters don't always know what this incident is and why they need it.

The inciting incident is an action or situation that causes conflict for the hero in your story. The hero must resolve this conflict by taking action.

In the film, *Final Destination*, the inciting incident is the scene in which high school student Alex Browning has a premonition that the plane he has just boarded will explode shortly after taking off.

He panics and leaves the plane, forcing one of his teachers and five of his classmates to leave the plane with him. The plane then takes off without them and explodes while flying over the airport.

Afterwards, Alex begins an investigation into the cause of this mid-air disaster. His investigation reveals that by leaving the plane before the explosion, he and his friends have cheated death. But, he soon learns that death is a real entity that will continue to pursue him and his friends.

Alex's premonition about the plane explosion is the inciting incident that maintains the focus of the film. The focus is Alex's battle with death.

You will find that the inciting incident in *your* story will help you develop and maintain the [focus of your screenplay](#).

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# Redefining the “Inciting Incident”

by Larry on June 20, 2010

**Part one of two. Maybe three.**

**Yeah, it’s *that* worthwhile if you’re serious about story structure. A bit complicated, too. Because it challenges what we thought to be true.**

Allow me to contribute to the potential confusion relative to what has been long referred to in the vocabulary of storytelling as the *Inciting Incident*.

A classic term. Writing 101. And just possibly, outdated.

Not confused? Read on, you might be in a moment. Because what you *think* you know about the *Inciting Incident* may not be completely correct. Maybe not even *complete*.

Let me add, too, that I’ve contributed to this confusion. Both here and in my ebook, *Story Structure Demystified*, which I’m revising accordingly.

This isn’t something I read about elsewhere. This is something I’ve discovered.

I realized the conventional definition of an Inciting Incident was perhaps deficient while I was wrapping up the final submission draft of my manuscript for my Writers Digest Book project – *Story Engineering: Understanding the Six Core Competencies of Successful Writing*, due out February 2011.

Sometimes our work informs *us*, when all along we thought it was the other way around.

This issue – the purpose, nature and location of an Inciting Incident within a story, and why we will all benefit from a better definition of it – needs closer inspection. Greater clarity. An enthusiastic drill down into the nuances.

Great storytelling is nothing if not dependent on nuance.

I’ve also realized that in going there, this might actually stir up more fog than it settles. So be it. Nobody said this storytelling stuff was easy.

Wrap your head around what I’m about to share and you’ll be a significantly better writer. Promise.

**The Present Take on an “Inciting Incident”**

So what *is* an Inciting Incident? The highest ranking [search engine answer](#) was this: *It’s when the story gets humped up and leads to the climax.*

Swear to God.

Wow. Color me underwhelmed. That’s like answering the question, “*What is puberty?*” with: *It’s when you grow hair in strange new places and babies happen.*

Virtually everywhere in the vast oeuvre of conventional storytelling wisdom the Inciting Incident is considered synonymous with the First Plot Point.

In fact, while screenwriters toss around both terms, novelists hardly ever use the term *First Plot Point* at all, which is perhaps why so many of us are confused.

A First Plot Point is the partition/break moment between Part (or Act) One and Part/Act Two in a novel or screenplay. The place where set-up yields to a game-changing revelation or action. The place where the hero gets her/his marching orders, where the stakes are plopped right into her/his lap, and where the antagonist surfaces to an extent that we understand what the hero must do and what will oppose them along the way.

The First Plot Point is where the hero’s story – the journey – really *begins*. Everything prior to that moment, regardless of how huge it is, is part of the set-up of that moment.

All of that *still* applies to the First Plot Point.

**And it applies to the Inciting Incident, too... unless it *doesn’t*.**

Because – get ready to get dizzy – while the Inciting Incident *can* indeed be (and often is) the First Plot Point, it doesn’t *have* to be. It can actually happen *earlier*, somewhere in Part/Act One prior to the optimal 20 to 25<sup>th</sup> percentile FPP mark.

It can even happen right off the bat. When it does, that’s called a *hook*. Yes, a hook can be an inciting incident, but it’s never a First Plot Point.

When an inciting incident happens early in a story, even mid-way through the set-up, then you *still* need to deliver a proper First Plot Point in the target zone of your story, right at the end of Part 1. When this is the case, the FPP is preceded by an inciting incident that is *actually* part of the set-up for it.

In which case, they are very different milestones, not to be confused

The risk is in allowing your early Inciting Incident to – in your writerly mind – serve as your First Plot Point. Big mistake. Maybe a deal killer.

The good news is you get to keep that early inciting incident scene, and you can make it as big as you want. The other news (not bad) is that you still need to push your story forward later, at the First Plot Point, and in the proper way, and in context to what you’ve put into play with your early Inciting Incident.

Put another way... an Inciting Incident can be part of the Part 1 set-up itself...or it can be the actual Plot Point One itself. Either way works.

**Which means the terms *Inciting Incident* and *First Plot Point* are not really – or at least, not *always* – synonymous after all.**

They are two powerful storytelling milestones than *can* be the same thing at the same time... or not.

What’s not flexible is this: when they *aren’t* the same, the Inciting Incident must *precede* the First Plot Point. Never the other way around. Because, as stated above, when the Inciting Incident comes earlier in the story it becomes *part of the set-up* (in Part/Act One) for the forthcoming critical, game-changing, story-launching FPP moment.

Where this gets really sticky is when you realize that the definitions of the two milestones, even when they exist in different places (for example, the early II occurs at the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile, and the FPP at the 24<sup>th</sup> percentile), can seem almost *identical* – something huge happens... a game-changer is thrown into the mix... the hero’s path is suddenly altered or even blown to smithereens... etc.

All of that can be *either* an Inciting Incident or a First Plot Point.

### **Here’s the difference.**

So why, if an inciting incident (notice how this is not capitalized in this instance, to help make this point) shows up early, *isn’t* it simply an early FPP? Especially when it does most of the assigned work of a FPP? Who cares if the FPP happens at the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile, anyhow?

Well, a prospect agent, editor or reader, for starters.

Because when that moment does happen early, even when it knocks the criteria for an FPP (other than sequential location) out of the ballpark, you still need to deliver a proper FPP at the proper location for purposes of optimal pacing and drama.

It’s like telling your 15-year old to move out of the house. It’s too early. Not smart. Not good parenting. Wait until the proper time to allow reality to overwhelm them.

When you *do* follow up an early Inciting Incident with a properly placed FPP, you’ll be building on the earlier II in such a way that the story is imbued with meaningful stakes and the hero’s journey once again takes on new direction and tension, which weren’t there when the earlier II occurred.

That’s why this is so important.

When the FPP is too early, an empathy-grabbing set-up is the sacrifice. And in fiction, reader empathy is *everything*.

### **An example will help illustrate.**

If you’ve been on Storyfix for a while, you may recall me discussing the 2004 movie *Collateral*, starring Tom Cruise and Jamie Foxx. Rent the DVD, it’s a structural and character storytelling clinic, especially on this issue.

Foxx is a humble but ambitious taxi driver in Los Angeles. Our hero, a great guy. Instant empathy. Cruise is the bad guy, an assassin arriving in L.A. to whack five different clients.

After some initial set-up that establishes stakes and reader empathy for our hero, Foxx picks up Cruise as a fare-paying passenger. Delivers him to an “appointment” and is told to wait in the cab for Cruise to return.

Foxx relaxes, munches a sandwich, goes over his business plan for the taxi company he dreams of starting. More sandwich. Family pictures. Dreams at stake. Soft background music. And then...

... a body sails out of a window above and comes crashing down on the roof of the taxi. Followed moments later by Cruise appearing, pointing a gun at Foxx.

Everything changes. What Foxx does in these next moments determines whether he lives or dies.

### Sounds like a First Plot Point, doesn’t it.

All of the criteria are in place... except one: placement.

This scene occurs at the 16<sup>th</sup> percentile. Too early for the FPP. As such, and because there is indeed a proper and legitimate First Plot Point lurking later at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, which also nails the requisite criteria for an FPP, this cab-crashing body moment becomes part of the set-up for the FPP.

Even though – and here it is – it is actually an *inciting incident*. Because it *incites* the story.

Call it what you will. Just don’t call it the First Plot Point. Functionally, the body dropping on the car is an *inciting incident*, pure and simple.

### Next — Part Two of this brain scrambler.

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Darren Cox [June 20, 2010 at 6:29 pm](#)

Hi Larry,

Long time no speak. You know, I’m glad you’ve elaborated on this one. I was speaking to my wife about this after I finished reading *Story Structure – Demystified* as I was totally and utterly confused as to how my book didn’t “fit” within the constraints of the structure you put forth. The rest of it fit – like pieces of a puzzle. But the beginning, for this story has an inciting incident on the first page!!! Yes, there’s a setup (we come to understand the character and his motivations, and get an idea on the simplicity of his life leading up to the first plot point, but the inciting incident (which I thought was the first plot point) made me think I need to write a bunch of pages prior to the beginning of my novel to “set things up”, when I didn’t WANT to do! I loved how it just jumped straight into the story.

I’d like to know more about your thoughts on this. Perhaps some more examples of how this has been written previously. I know Dean Koontz writes a lot of books where the inciting incident is on the first pages.

Just out of curiosity, will we have to pay for an updated version of the book?

Speak soon mate,

Regards

Darren



Patrick Sullivan [June 20, 2010 at 8:11 pm](#)

Hm, this is giving me a lot to chew on, mostly because it’s making me look at a story I’ve started plotting out in a very different way. It’s 55 scenes, and scene wise the various major points (FPP, SPP, MP, pinch points, etc) are all in place... but first page of chapter 1 (still up in the air about a prologue, though without it that cuts me to 54 scenes in the current plotting) is something that feels like MORE than a hook, since it’s going to be the INITIAL story driver (there’s still a major about face at the FPP to make the story bigger than it was before that point) where the MCs daughter has disappeared and he’s calling the police.

But if I treat that as the Inciting incident, it makes perfect sense. It sends the initial plot into motion, but still within the framework of his normal, pre-FPP world. HMmmmmm I will have to play with that a bit.



Kelly [June 20, 2010 at 8:31 pm](#)

Larry. What a way to spend your Father’s Day, not to mention your jet-lag recovery time. Very ambitious entry right off the bat.

After reading this twice, I see your point about II not equalling FPP.

Like Darren and Patrick, I have an early hook in my WIP. Page one, scene one, as a matter of fact.

And it really is an inciting incident. It just doesn’t directly affect the hero until about the 27th percentile, when he’s forced to alter the course of his life because of the bad guy.

Is “hook” the same as “inciting incident?” To me, this implies that there might be multiple inciting incidents before the FPP.

Yes?

Thanks– Kelly



Larry [June 20, 2010 at 9:00 pm](#)

@Darren, Patrick and Kelly — all three of you are right on the money here. When an inciting incident happens to be the opening of a story, then it is indeed a “hook.” And that’s good. A hook — which can take many forms and formats — is always an effective part of a great Part 1 set-up, leading to a Plot Point that lends meaning to it while adding stakes and the context of an antagonist with other plans and needs than those of the hero.

I alluded to this in the post, but didn’t want to hammer it, because this is already a complex issue. But when you consider the role of “hook” for an inciting incident, you now have three possible destinations where an inciting incident can pop up — hook, middle of the set-up, or as the First Plot Point. It can be one, two or all three of these things. It can even be more, with the inclusion of yet another killer twist in the set-up, but then you’re getting a bit cluttered for an opening act, and possibly at the expense of the other things Part 1 is called upon to accomplish.

I love stories that open big, and it sounds like you guys do, too. Anything that “incites” an ensuing story qualifies as an “inciting incident” — including an opening hook — leaving it up to the writer to decide how to apply this powerful technique.

Thanks for contributing to this... great stuff from you.



[Deanna Schraye June 21, 2010 at 11:00 am](#)

Wow, what a brain twister Larry, but, when reading with a clear mind, (yes, that would be the 4th time), this makes so much sense.

I too thought I had an II right off the bat [in my WIP] – first scene – but, now that you’ve explained the difference between II, FPP, and hook, I would consider it to be “just” a hook. The good news is that it sounds as if I may actually be on track with pacing, something I’ve always found challenging.

Thanks so much for this post and I look forward to more!



[Mary E. Ulrich June 21, 2010 at 1:26 pm](#)

“you now have three possible destinations where an inciting incident can pop up — hook, middle of the set-up, or as the First Plot Point.”

I need another example



[Yvette Davis June 21, 2010 at 6:21 pm](#)

I like it when some stories start with a bang! and then go on from there. Yes, the story does still need a PP1, I know that now. Thanks!



[Laureli Illoura June 21, 2010 at 9:06 pm](#)

LOVING this stuff! Thank you for further clarification (I thought it was just me- lacking some necessary logic to understand the post before this one). I’m on the right track ... however, without bullets and car chases or other mystery/thriller material, I’m dealing with a character-driven girly story, and no where near the end though I do have an outline-and inciting incidents... but how does one know the 25% mark?

WHEW!



[Pegg Thomas June 22, 2010 at 5:46 am](#)

This makes sense to me especially in the romance genre. I can think of romance books I’ve read that very much follow that earlier II timing.



[JW Newcum June 22, 2010 at 6:17 pm](#)

Elsewhere, the II has been known as ‘the call to adventure’ ... an invitation to a quest. The FPP is the acceptance of the call. Between the two, the hero may, in fact, try to avoid the quest which could lead to dire consequences, but still part of the setup for the FPP. Finally, though, if there is to be a story told, the hero accepts the call, either willingly or not, and enters the ‘magical’ land of the story, whatever and wherever that is.

So, the II and the FPP are about the hero. The hook is about/for the reader.



[Larry June 23, 2010 at 8:11 pm](#)

@Mary — you’ve asked for another example, so here goes. I’ve suggested three placed where a valid Inciting Incident can be placed within Part 1, and to add to the confusion, two of them also have other names. Since there isn’t an example that comes to mind that uses all three — though I’m sure they’re out there — allow me to be hypothetical and make one up for you.

In the second scene of this story, a woman is kidnapped. That’s really early, so it’s a hook, not a Plot Point. It’s also an Inciting Incident, because it “incites” the forthcoming story.

At the 12th percentile, our hero (the woman) escapes. But she has to be clever since the original kidnapper is right on her tail. This is a plot twist, but it’s not the Plot Point (for two reasons: it’s still too early, and it doesn’t give the story the “meaning” — with regard to the hero’s ultimate quest in this story — for the stakes and tension to become fully realized.

At the Plot Point (let’s say, at the 23rd percentile mark), our woman is still on the run. In fact, she’s run into the arms of her husband in the scene right BEFORE the plot point... but in the next scene — and this IS the plot point — we learn that the kidnapper is none other than her husband himself. So she has to run again, and because her husband is a U.S. Senator, nobody will believe her when she tries to get help.

Three Inciting Incidents... one the story’s hook... another a killer plot twist... and the third the intended Plot Point that fully defines her story-quest and the stakes, as well as the opposition (none of which were present with the “false/early PP at 12%).

Hope this helps. Let me know what you think. Larry



[Kathleen MacIver June 25, 2010 at 7:19 am](#)

Thanks for recommending we go back and read the comments on these last two! Somehow they did clarify exactly what I was struggling with.

I have a story that I’m practicing this on, and my hook is that this girl is trying to get her friend, a courier, to take her to her home city with him, so she can care for her sick mother. She doesn’t know that Kieran is carrying something that the enemy will kill for...and the enemy’s on his trail right at that moment. He can’t tell her about it because he’s sworn to absolute secrecy.

So he’s telling her ‘no’ and she’s insisting. (She’s strong-willed and stubborn and too apt to get into trouble on her own on a normal day, so the prospect of trying to keep her safe on a journey like this isn’t pretty, even without what he’s carrying.) And then her father joins her, begging Kieran to take her back to help his wife. He succumbs...and then wonders if he’s lost his mind. heeheehee!

That’s my hook, the first scene. The story is the journey home, and them falling in love along the way. (This is YA.)

So I was REALLY struggling with figuring out what the FPP should be/could be, etc.

But somehow, these comments clarified it for me. You see...the next few scenes are them leaving the

city, her innocently thinking it’s a journey with the normal low-level danger, and him doing all he can to lose those on his tail. I have him marginally successful until a few chapters in.

Now I realize, all I have to do is make him THINK he’s successfully lost those after him. He failed in keeping her from coming along with him, but he thinks he’s okay as long as he really has lost them. So then, that FPP is the moment he realized he failed in that, too. The moment he realizes that he really DOES have the now-enormous task of not only getting himself home alive with what he’s carrying, but also getting his headstrong, adventuresome, and clueless friend home safely as well...and keeping her from making the whole thing even more difficult without telling her what he’s sworn not to.

That’s my huge BINGO!!!! This fits SOOOO well. Thanks!

And BTW, this is a short story/novella, which is why the FPP is only a couple of chapters in. I really does work on short stories as well. I tested an older story I wrote with your story structure, and realized that if I’d added another chapter in box #4, all of the points would have wound up in the exact right spots...which explained why the ending felt rushed. It NEEDED that extra chapter.

So THAT answers the Laureli’s question about how this stuff helps you when you don’t know how long the story will be yet. You just keep it in mind and write, but once your story is written and you’re editing, you use it to help smooth out your pacing.



flibgibbet [June 26, 2010 at 12:43 pm](#)

If you rename the First Plot Point as the First Major TURNING Point instead, this dicussion is easier to grasp, at least for me. The latter is exactly what it says it is: The moment the story turns and the hero HAS to become PROACTIVE and change directions if he wants to survive.

Sometimes, only restrospect allows you to separate the II (or II’s in some cases) from the FMTP, because only then can you see how much more important/significant the one is from the other. If a character is simply trying to survive, going along to get along (as in the II of Collateral Damage), it’s not a Major Turning Point.

If you think of a story as having three Major Turning Points in all, I think it’s easier to understand the structure of most successful stories. Each MTP requires a serious change in stakes, a major sacrifice from the character who’s being squeezed tighter and tighter, with the final (third) MOST MAJOR Turning Point setting up that Belly of the Beast moment when our hero is trapped and must risk everything single thing he personally holds dear. (And I’m not just talking action movies here. The definition of Risk depends on the character/genre).

What muddies the waters, I think, is that within each Arc of the story, there are mini-turning points which exist to set-up the Major Turning Points. (II’s, I consider minis). The Mini’s set up the Major, but they’re also the place where the originality of the story/characters shines through. Particular characters whose particular lives are interrupted by particular circumstances.



Larry [June 27, 2010 at 9:48 am](#)

@flibgibbet — first off, great name there. May I call you Flip? Flipper? The Flipster?

Can’t argue with your semantics. If an Inciting Incident early — which, technically, is a plot “point” in

the sense that it is a “story point,” then the FPP isn’t really the “First” plot point. But rather than rename it, as you say, I have to say that in novels the term “First Plot Point” is already a bit of a renaming. And, perhaps ironically, the thing it was initially called in some circles was, in fact, the Inciting Incident. That said, can’t argue with your suggestion — think of it (if not rename it) the First Major Turning Point.

But I could argue that’s not always true, either. An early Inciting Incident is still a choice, and when that happen then “the turning point moment” were’re talking about here really isn’t the “first” afterall.

It gets muddy when the line between noun and adjective blurs in this regard. For me, I’m trying to bring a screenwriter’s structural discipline and sensibility to novels, and in doing so I contend that the vocabulary (where “First Plot Point” is an untouchable term) to it. And many readers are getting it, and clearly, for the first time.

Your contribution will help all of us “get it” even more clearly. So thanks for that, Flip.

In any case, it’s all semantics, and the real issue — as you clearly and poignantly state in your Comment — is that the writer be able to wrap her/his head around it. Whatever works is all good. L.



Monica [June 28, 2010 at 9:56 am](#)

Seems my post from a few days ago never made it here thru cyberspace. Don’t know if a post to an old entry is ever seen, but I’ve got to try again.

I MUST express my gratitude to u, Larry, for clarifying this issue. It has plagued me for some time, & when diff. authors use the terminology diff., it doesn’t help. You’ve cleared up all my confusion & let me confidently assess my opening of my WIP. (My hook/II is too late, so I’m combining that scene w/ my first, sort of.)

You said:

The FPP lends meaning to the hook while “...adding stakes and the context of an antagonist with other plans and needs than those of the hero.”

Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. Put that on Ur monitor. Put that on Ur bulletin board. Put it on Ur forehead. It’s a keeper.

You’ve done it again, Larry.



flibgibbet [June 28, 2010 at 11:44 am](#)

Thanks for the response Larry. Stumbled upon your website very recently and am glad to have found it. I read McKee’s “Story” and found it fascinating, even though I’m not a screen-writer. Stories are stories, so now will check out your books.

A little trivia to brighten your day: “Flibgibbet” is short-hand for “flibbertigibbet”—a flighty, frivolous and restless person. What a great word! Wish I’d invented it.

Cheers.



[Tony McFadden December 7, 2010 at 3:35 am](#)

About six months late to this conversation, but it's given me six months to think about this.

If (and this is how I think about it now) the First Plot Point is the event that knocks our hero out of his status quo trajectory, then the inciting incident is the rocket that is launched to impact his (or her) trajectory. The hero may or may not know about that rocket, it *has* to launch well before the first plot point, and even if the hero thinks s/he sees it coming, when it hits it alters the hero's actions to the final conclusion.



[Larry December 7, 2010 at 8:43 am](#)

@Tony — absolutely perfect analogy. Love it. Think I'll pass it on, if you don't mind (and give you credit). Nice. L.



[Tony McFadden December 7, 2010 at 12:26 pm](#)

No problem, Larry. After all of the good advice I've taken from your site, you can certainly take one back.

Refined it a bit in the shower this morning, though...

FPP is the rocket that changes hero's trajectory, inciting incident is the lit fuse (or however rockets are launched these days).



[Minogue November 11, 2011 at 9:40 am](#)

Inciting Incident vs Call to Adventure RESOLVED here: <http://www.clickok.co.uk/Inciting-Incident-Call-To-Adventure.pdf>

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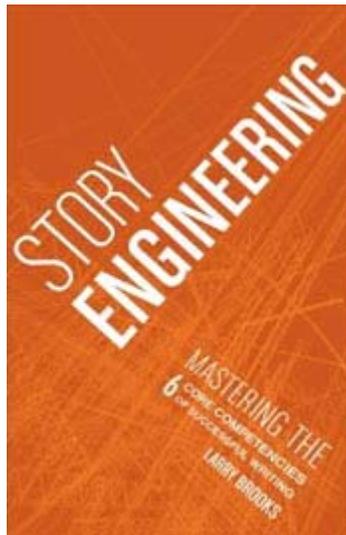
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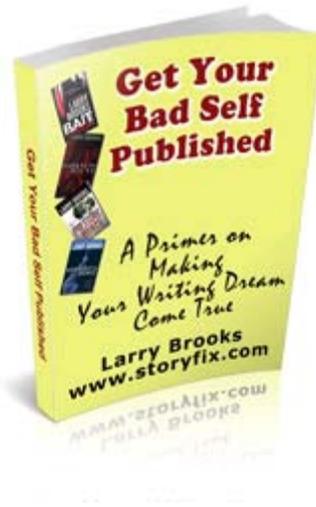
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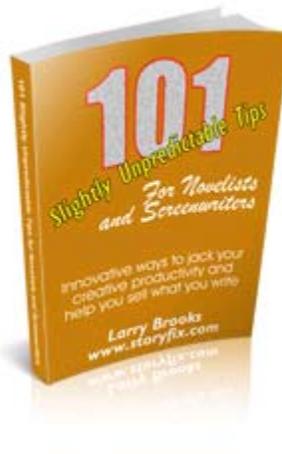
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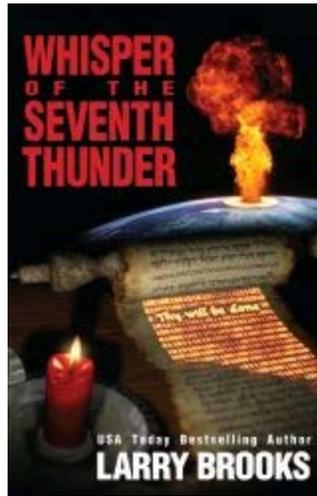
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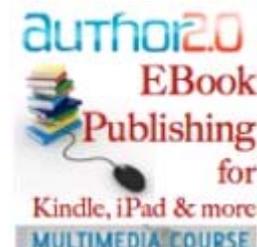
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# What is an Inciting Incident in a Screenplay?

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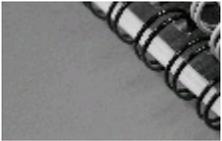
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when does the story really begin? - *pindyath*



Screenplay books and articles are littered with terminology and jargon. This article discusses what is meant by "the inciting incident".

Where and when does a story really begin in a **screenplay** (<http://writingforstagescreen.suite101.com/>)? It is after the inciting incident has taken place.

## What is an Inciting Incident?

The inciting incident is the moment or plot point in a script that kicks the story into motion. It occurs after the set up or exposition and everything that follows the inciting incident should be a result of the inciting incident. It is where a story really begins.

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It is that moment in the script where the protagonist's world is turned upside down and he/she must then set about resolving the change in circumstances that the incident has brought about. It is generally a clear and defined moment that is easily identifiable.

It is often used in the context of three act structure but it can be applied to all story writing because all stories must contain an inciting incident.

## Read This Next

- **[Simple Basics of Screenwriting](http://william-sokolic.suite101.com/simple-basics-of-screenwriting-a116098)**  
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## Examples of Good Inciting Incidents

A good example of an inciting incident would be in David Lynch and Mark Frost's T.V series *Twin Peaks*. The inciting incident occurs when the body of Laura Palmer is discovered. Everything that follows this discovery is because of this discovery. Twin Peaks was just (on the surface) a regular town where all was apparently fine until this incident occurred. All the plot developments and complications that follow the discovery are intrinsically related to the discovery in some way.

A further example would be in *Back to the Future*. The inciting incident or point of attack occurs in this film when Marty is accidentally sent back in time. From this moment on Marty must try and get himself back to where he has come from.

## Other Names for the Inciting Incident

The inciting incident is sometimes called

- The Point of Attack
- The Hook

## What Makes a Good Inciting Incident?

A good inciting incident should be striking, exciting and alter the protagonist's situation dramatically from what it was before. It is also preferable if the inciting incident includes some kind of physical element i.e it doesn't just occur inside the protagonist's head.

For example in *Cast Away* starring Tom Hanks, the inciting incident is the plane crash that leaves him stranded on a desert island. It is a strong inciting incident because it is dramatic, physical and it leaves the audience asking, "how is he going to get out of this situation?". The inciting incident is like a promise to

the audience that says “if you keep watching you are going to have an entertaining experience”

For some advice on further screen writing literature please read [An Introduction to Screenwriting Books \(http://www.suite101.com/content/an-introduction-to-screenwriting-books-a61178\)](http://www.suite101.com/content/an-introduction-to-screenwriting-books-a61178) and for some essential facts about classic plot writing and plot types please read [The Seven Basic Plots. \(http://www.suite101.com/content/what-are-the-seven-basic-plot-definitions-a58402\)](http://www.suite101.com/content/what-are-the-seven-basic-plot-definitions-a58402)

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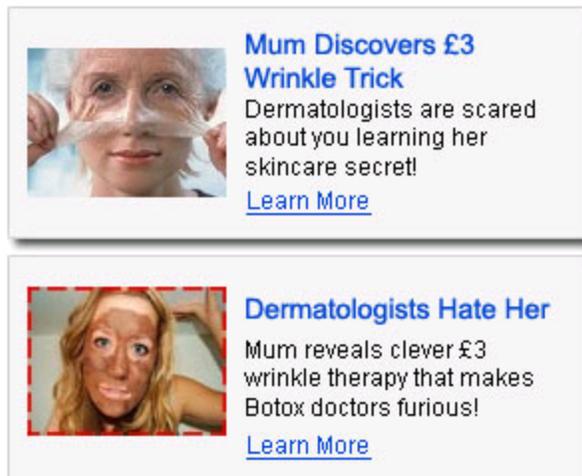
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