

SP08_FILM 1010 - Plot Segmentation guidelines

The following guidelines are based on material in *Film Art: An Introduction, 8th ed.*, by Bordwell and Thompson.

As a movie progresses from beginning to middle to end, it can be helpful to describe this development in detail as a plot segmentation. A segmentation is a division of the film into structural units based on narrative time and space. It provides an overview of the film's structure.

In constructing the segmentation, you're trying to strike a balance between noting every scene and reducing the film to three major acts. How do you know when one segment ends and another begins?

- A.) There is a change in time and/or place
- B.) The segment has "unity" (may not be time and/or space)

Look for cinematic devices like fades, dissolves, cuts, and black screens as markers of the ends of sequences.

The plot segmentation "blueprint" you construct should help you see more clearly the kinds of patterns used to maintain the progression of the film as well as the way in which narrative form shapes your experience of the movie.

Consider the following segmentation of *The Wizard of Oz*:

THE WIZARD OF OZ: PLOT SEGMENTATION

C. Credits

1. Kansas

- a. Dorothy is at home, worried about Miss Gulch's threat to Toto.
- b. Running away, Dorothy meets Professor Marvel, who induces her to return home.
- c. A tornado lifts the house, with Dorothy and Toto, into the sky.

2. Munchkin City

- a. Dorothy meets Glinda, and the Munchkins celebrate the death of the Wicked Witch of the East.
- b. The Wicked Witch of the West threatens Dorothy over the Ruby Slippers.
- c. Glinda sends Dorothy to seek the Wizard's help.

3. The Yellow Brick Road

- a. Dorothy meets the Scarecrow.
- b. Dorothy meets the Tin Man.
- c. Dorothy meets the Cowardly Lion.

4. The Emerald City

- a. The Witch creates a poppy field near the city, but Glinda rescues the travelers.
- b. The group is welcomed by the city's citizens.
- c. As they wait to see the Wizard, the Lion sings of being king.
- d. The terrifying Wizard agrees to help the group if they obtain the Wicked Witch's broomstick.

5. The Witch's castle and nearby woods

- a. In the woods, flying monkeys carry off Dorothy and Toto.
- b. The Witch realizes that she must kill Dorothy to get the ruby slippers.
- c. The Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion sneak into the Castle; in the ensuing chase, Dorothy kills the Witch.

6. The Emerald City

- a. Although revealed as a humbug, the Wizard grants the wishes of the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion.
- b. Dorothy fails to leave with the Wizard's hot-air balloon but is transported home by the ruby slippers.

7. Kansas--Dorothy describes Oz to her family and friends

E. End credits