

FOOLSCAP VIDEO #2

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If for some reason you missed the first video, there's a link on the page that you can click on and it'll deliver that to you.

We were talking last time on the subject of writing a novel, particularly getting over the hump from being unpublishable to being publishable and I was talking about this technique called the Foolscap Method that my dear friend and mentor Norm Stahl taught me years ago.

The basic concept is to put the entire outline of the novel on one page, not in a 55-page outline, not in a 300-page Bible; but in one page. That way, you kind of break the back of the story right at the start and you get a handle on it right away. But then that leads to the question "What exactly do you put on this page?" I said that I would take you through the Foolscap pages that I used for writing *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, which was my first published novel. So that's what I'm going to do now.

So we're talking about a story, but this could be any enterprise at all. This could be getting your daughter into Harvard, opening a restaurant, invading Afghanistan; it'll all work in this concept.

Step #1: Whatever the enterprise is, whatever the story is, break it into three parts. I learned this from Shawn as much as from anybody. If there's a single golden rule, if there's one magic bullet, this is it. Why three parts? Because three is the magic number, it has been since the pyramids; Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, beginning, middle, end. Now here is what I did on this page for *The Legend of Bagger Vance*. There's:

- Act I: Judah's Crisis
- Act II: The Golf Match

➤ Act III: Bagger Returns

It's as simple as that. It doesn't need to be anything longer than that.

Now let me talk about some stories that you will probably be a lot more familiar with to explain a 1, 2, 3 situation. The first *Rocky*; how can you break that down on one page into three acts? Incredibly simple.

- Act I. Rocky starts out as a bum
 - Rocky then gets picked by Apollo Creed to fight him
- Act II. Rocky trains, all the stuff of:
 - Climbing the steps
 - Running up the steps
 - Mickey the trainer
 - Chasing the chicken around
 - Punching the sides of beef
- Act III. The Fight
 - Rocky fights Apollo

Act I, Act II, Act III for The movie *The Hangover*:

- Act I The guys go to Las Vegas
 - They lose their friend Doug
 - Things happened that they'd forgotten overnight
- Act II. They search for Doug
- Act III. They find Doug

This is why the Foolscap Method is so great. When you can break down your story into something so simple, it really gives you confidence that you know you've got a handle on this thing. So, step one is breaking the story down into three parts; Act I., Act II, Act III, putting it on paper.

Step #2: The device of narration. How is the story told?

One way to think about this...let's think about *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Now let's say that we have Act I., Act II, and Act III very clear in our mind. The next question becomes – how do we tell the story? Whose point of view is it told from and what is the

narrative device? Now if you think about that story from the point of view of Harper Lee the writer trying to figure out how she's going to tell it. She could have told it from the point of view of Atticus Finch, it could have been told from a grownup; how he did the trial, how he defended Tom, etc, etc. It could have been told from the point of view of "Boo" Radley, it could have been told from the omniscient author in the third person. Each one of those would have altered the story, made it an entirely different story. One of the minor characters, the boy named Dill who lived next door, was actually the real life Truman Capote, who was Harper Lee's friend, so she could have told it through his point of view.

Instead, she decided to tell it through her own point of view as the young girl, Scout, the daughter of Atticus Finch. She also further decided to tell it in recollection, rather than in real time and what that accomplished for her and made the story so great was that through a little girls' eyes, she could communicate the mystery of "Boo" Radley, this crazy guy next door. Was he a killer or whatever? And also, she could be suitably in awe of her dad, Atticus Finch, the wonderful, great lawyer about whom the whole story was about. So that's the narrative device in that.

In *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, I have a young boy named Hardy Greaves; I really kind of stole this from Harper Lee. And here, his name is Hardy; this is the 'H'. Hardy narrates the match, which is Act II, the Golf match, and the central thing. He narrates the match in recollection and then he narrates The Return of Bagger Vance Act III in real time. So this was a device of having a young boy who participated in an event years and years ago, recalling it in a kind of hazy, romantic memory and then having events unfold in real time as he's telling it.

Here we now have Act I, Act II, Act III and the narrative device.

Before I finish this up, let me talk about *The Hangover* for a second because this is a great movie that has a great narrative device. The device there is the boys go to Las Vegas and they get drunk and they're about to go out on the town and party, then the movie cuts to the next morning; they're waking up, can't remember a thing. There's a live tiger in the room, there's a live baby, there's a chicken and there's all kinds of other stuff going on and they've lost their friend Doug. So the movie unfolds in them trying to

uncover in real time what happened the night before and that's what made the story work and what made it great. That's the narrative device.

Can you see, from what I've just said, if we have Act I, Act II, Act III only in just one little part of the page and up here the narrative device, we've pretty much got the story licked. On one page, we haven't even talked about what I'm going to tell you here in the next part.

Step #3: The next thing we need to address on this Foolscap page is theme and again, this is a killer, this is the most important aspect of all and the hardest aspect of all.

What is the story about?

I have said this before. I have written novels all the way through that worked and I had no idea what the story was about until it was all over and I finally had to kind of think about it. But the theme must be there because the theme will tell you the climax, the antagonist and all of the events from back to front.

Just as an example, what is the theme of *Casablanca*, let's say? *Casablanca* is the story of a guy who starts out thinking only about himself and who, by the end of the story, is willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. That's all it takes to write out the theme. *Rocky*; the story of a guy who's a bum, who proves to himself and to the world that he's not a bum. Now here in *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, for the novel, not so much the movie, the theme was *The Authentic Swing*.

On the page here, I also have *The Authentic swing equals previous lives*. And the second thing I have, *Swing is Remembered*. These are two concepts; the idea that there's such a thing as *The Authentic Swing*, and that's why it's the title of this book that's about the writing of *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, that we each possess one swing which equates to oneself, one soul that is ours alone, that nobody else has.

Therefore, the crisis, Judas' crisis, our protagonist crisis, is that he has lost his swing, lost himself, lost his soul and so he must recover it. That's the whole process of the movie. Act I, Act II and Act III and the idea, this is actually a steal from Plato. Plato believed that all knowledge is not learned, but remembered. And so what I stole was the golf swing is not learned, it's remembered. In other words, our character who has lost himself, lost his soul has to somehow re-find who he is and that's what the story's about.

Now, if we have Act I, Act II, Act III, the narrative device and the theme, we are 90 yards down the field and the goal line is in sight.

Step #4: Now I'm going to go a little bit more into the actual detail here of what's on the page. The inciting incident and the climax. Let me give you an example of an inciting incident if this term is not familiar to you. The inciting incident is the moment when the story begins and the crisis and the climax is when the story is resolved. A lot of times, a movie will start and it won't really take off until 15 minutes into the movie. The inciting incident in *Rocky*; we start off with Rocky, he's a bum, he's hanging around Philadelphia and Apollo Creed, the heavyweight champion of the world, picks his name out of a book of contenders, the Italian stallion and says "I'm going to fight him". Now when Apollo, the world champion, picks this bum, that's the inciting incident, that's when the story takes off.

The inciting incident in any story also implies, imbedded in it, is the climax. From the minute Apollo Creed picks Rocky, we know the climax is going to be 'Rocky fights Apollo Creed'. So if you can take your story, whatever is floating around in your head, and find out what is the inciting incident and then what is the climax, you have a spine all the way through that story. If you think that this is formula or too predictable, I'll take you back to *The Iliad*, to Homer and 950 BC.

What we have so far is break the story into three parts, determine the narrative device (how the story is being told), identify the theme (what the story is about) and then the inciting incident and the climax and the through line between them. That is enormous.

In a way, I think the writing of a story, you kind of go into this garage and on the floor of the garage, you have all of the parts in separate places that will make a Maserati but you don't know how to put the Maserati together. This is how you put the Maserati together.

I strongly urge you, if you don't use this, do something like this. If you want to a 55-page treatment, do it after this. If you want to do the 3x5 cards on the wall, do it after this. Do this first. Break the back of the story in your mind.