



**JEFFREY ALAN SCHECHTER'S**

# How to Structure the Bulletproof Teen Sitcom



[www.mscbuys.com](http://www.mscbuys.com)

# Career Highlights

- Got into the WGA with action films such as BLOODSPORT II, THE TOWER, and STREETKNIGHT.
- Optioned and rewrote LITTLE BIG FOOT for Working Title Films
- Rewrote THE AMAZING PANDA ADVENTURE for Warner Brothers
- Original writer for DENNIS THE MENACE STRIKES AGAIN.
- Script doctor on IT TAKES TWO.
- Sold spec screenplay STANLEY'S CUP to Walt Disney Pictures in a deal worth over a million dollars.
- Rewrote I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS for the Walt Disney Company
- Wrote the TV movie BRINK! for the Disney Channel. WGA nominee.
- Wrote BEETHOVEN'S 3RD for Universal Studios.
- Diversified into animation & live-action television, writing dozens of episodes for series such as THE FAMOUS JETT JACKSON, ANIMORPHS, MARTIN MYSTERY, TOTALLY SPIES, TEAM GALAXY, GET ED, FREEFONIX, DI-GATA DEFENDERS, HOT WHEELS BATTLE FORCE 5, and JANE AND THE DRAGON.
- Wrote two Care Bears CG movies. WGC Nominee for THE BIG WISH MOVIE
- Two Emmy nominations for writing/story editing on STRANGE DAYS AT BLAKE HOLSEY HIGH for NBC/Discovery Channel.
- BAFTA nomination for an episode of the series I wrote and directed.
- Diversified into drama with the Hallmark Channel TV movie OUT OF THE WOODS.
- Co-created several TV series including OVERRULED!, currently airing on the Disney Channel and STARZ. Gemini Award for producing.
- Co-wrote the hockey film BREAKAWAY
- Wrote the 4-hour miniseries EXPLODING SUN for Muse/Sonar Entertainment

# Stuff I've Done (By The Numbers)

## EPISODIC TELEVISION

**Written -- 81 1/2 hours**  
**Story Edited -- 160 1/2 hours**  
**Created -- 4 series that went to development**  
**3 series that went to pilot**  
**1 series that went to broadcast (3 seasons)**



## FEATURES & TV MOVIES

**7 Family Features**  
**5 Animated Features**  
**4 Action Features**  
**4 Comedy Features**  
**1 Sci-Fi Action Feature**  
**3 Family TV Movies**  
**2 Drama TV Movies**  
**1 Action TV Movie**  
**1 Comedy TV Movie**  
**1 Action/Fantasy Miniseries**  
**1 Western Miniseries**  
**1 Sci-Fi Miniseries**  
**1 Million Dollar Spec Screenplay**  
**1 Zombie Western TV Movie**

# 3 Questions

- 1. Who are the buyers?**
- 2. What are they buying?**
- 3. Why a pilot and not a spec?**

# **#1 - Who are the buyers?**

**The Disney Channel**

**Nickelodeon**

**Cartoon Network**

**ABC Family**

**The CW**

**Dreamworks**

**Amazon Studios**

# #2 - What are they buying?

**The Disney Channel** - *Sweet and charming*

**Nickelodeon** - *Rebellious*

**70's & 80's shows, redone:**

***Dog With A Blog = Alf***

***Sam and Cat = Laverne & Shirley***

***Good Luck Charlie = Family Ties***

***Jessie = Charles in Charge***

***Wizards of Waverly Place = Bewitched***

# **#3 - Why a pilot and not a spec?**

- 1. Excellent sample without pigeonholing**
- 2. It's all you**
- 3. It's always pilot season**
- 4. You might just sell it**

# Step #1 - Know Your Show

- **What tone is your show?**
  - **Disney or Nick?**
- **What style is your show?**
  - **Individual Stories?**
  - **Connected Stories?**
- **How do you get 100 episodes?**



# How Do You Get to 100 Episodes?

## Some Common Factors

- **High concept, however BIG concepts aren't selling**
- **Funny**
- **Multi-camera**
- **Kid relatable**
- **Smart voices**
- **6 to 12 age range**
- **Dead center relative to what's already on the air**
- **Juvenile adults**

# **Step #2: Know Your Series Pitch**

**Decode your series with the  
Sitcom QuickPitch.**

# The Teen Sitcom QuickPitch Formula

**“An imperfect yet aspirational young teen whose life is governed or impacted by an outside force finds himself or herself involved in an ongoing struggle for ‘normalcy’ when something extraordinary happens, only to discover that he or she has to work through his or her own character imperfections that will, when overcome by effort and self-growth, enable the teen to become an admirable young adult.**”



**“A tightly-wound yet fun-loving young girl becomes both a member of a blended family and owner of a talking dog, only to discover that she is going to have to work through her type-A control issues and learn to cope with the step-brother she dislikes in order to help her complicated new family succeed.”**

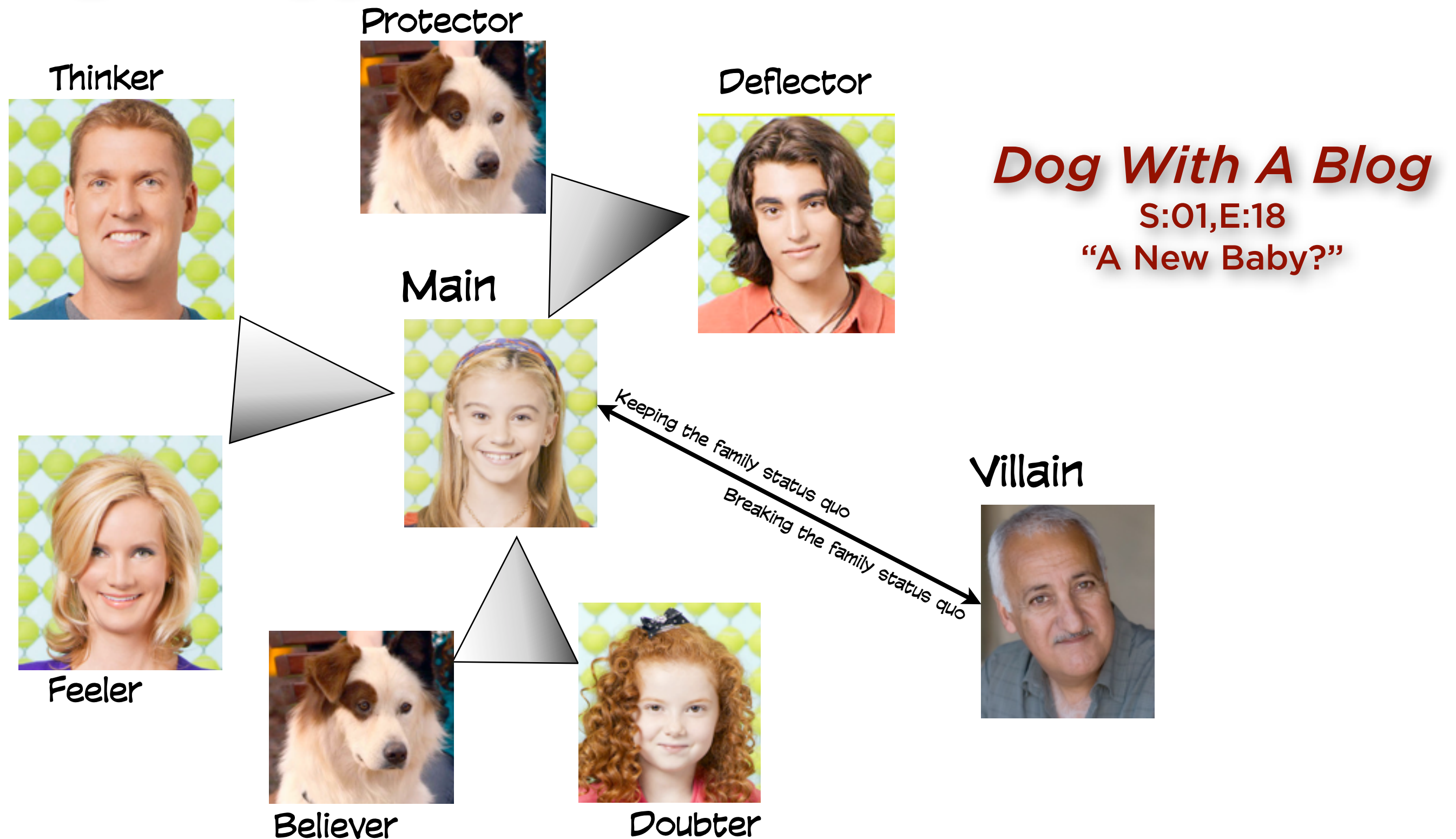
**“A hot-headed, yet self-assured tomboy starts a babysitting service with a slightly dim but loving friend which causes endless complications and problems for them both, only to discover that taking care of others is the best - albeit annoying - way for her to grow into a more caring person.**



# **Step #3: Know Your Cast**

**Shows are often ensembles,  
not starring vehicles**

# Unity of Opposites TV Character Chart



# HEROES & HEROINES

From “The Complete Writer’s Guide to  
Heroes & Heroines”  
by Tami D. Cowden, Caro LaFever, Sue Vidars



<http://www.tamicowden.com/>

# Hero & Heroine Archetypes

## Eight Hero Archetypes

The Chief  
The Bad Boy  
The Best Friend  
The Charmer  
The Lost Soul  
The Professor  
The Swashbuckler  
The Warrior

## Eight Heroine Archetypes

The Boss  
The Seductress  
The Spunky Kid  
The Free Spirit  
The Waif  
The Librarian  
The Crusader  
The Nurturer



# Hero Archetypes

**The CHIEF:** a dynamic leader, he has time for nothing but work. He might have been born to lead, or perhaps he conquered his way to the top, but either way, he's tough, decisive, goal-oriented. That means he is also a bit overbearing and inflexible. Think William Shatner in *Star Trek*; Harrison Ford in *Sabrina*, or Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*.

**The BAD BOY:** dangerous to know, he walks on the wild side. This is the rebel, or the boy from the wrong side of the tracks. He's bitter and volatile, a crushed idealist, but he's also charismatic and street smart. Think James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, Matt Damon in *Good Will Hunting*, Patrick Swayze in *Dirty Dancing*.

**The BEST FRIEND:** sweet and safe, he never lets anyone down. He's kind, responsible, decent, a regular Mr. Nice Guy. This man doesn't enjoy confrontation and can sometimes be unassertive because he doesn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. But he'll always be there. Think Jimmy Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life*, Adam Sandler in *The Wedding Singer*, Hugh Grant in *Four Weddings & a Funeral*, Kevin Spacey in *American Beauty*.

**The CHARMER:** more than a gigolo, he creates fantasies. He's fun, irresistible, a smooth operator, yet not too responsible or dependable. He might be a playboy or a rogue, but he's doesn't commit to a woman easily. Think Leonardo DiCaprio in *Titanic*, James Garner/Mel Gibson in *Maverick*, Don Johnson in *Nash Bridges*, Dustin Hoffman in *Midnight Cowboy*.

# Hero Archetypes

**The LOST SOUL:** a sensitive being, he understands. Tortured, secretive, brooding, and unforgiving. That's this man. But he's also vulnerable. He might be a wanderer or an outcast. In work he's creative, but probably also a loner. Think Mel Gibson in *Lethal Weapon*, David Duchovny in *The X-Files*, Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*, Shrek.

**The PROFESSOR:** coolly analytical, he knows every answer. He's logical, introverted, and inflexible, but genuine about his feelings. At work, he likes cold, hard facts, thank you very much, but he's also honest and faithful, and won't let you down. Think Leonard Nimoy in *Star Trek*, Robin Williams in *Flubber*, Kelsey Grammer in *Frasier*, Russell Crowe in *A Beautiful Mind*.

**The SWASHBUCKLER:** Mr. Excitement, he's an adventure. This guy is action, action, and more action. He's physical and daring. Fearless, he's a daredevil, or an explorer. He needs thrills and chills to keep him happy. Think Antonio Banderas in *The Mask of Zorro*, Michael Douglas in *Romancing the Stone*, Harrison Ford in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

**The WARRIOR:** a noble champion, he acts with honor. This man is the reluctant rescuer or the knight in shining armor. He's noble, tenacious, relentless, and he always sticks up for the underdog. If you need a protector, he's your guy. He doesn't buckle under to rules, or and he doesn't go along just to get along. Think Clint Eastwood in *Dirty Harry*, Russell Crowe in *Gladiator*, Mel Gibson in *Braveheart*.

# Heroine Archetypes

**The BOSS:** a real go-getter, she climbs the ladder of success. This is a “take charge” female, who accepts nothing but respect. Reaching her goal post the most important thing in life to her, and she isn’t bothered by a few ruffled feathers along the way. Think Annette Bening in *American Beauty*, Candice Bergen in *Murphy Brown*, Cate Blanchett in *Elizabeth*.

**The SEDUCTRESS:** an enchantress, she gets her way. This is a lady who is long accustomed to sizing up everyone in a room the minute she enters. Mysterious and manipulative, she hides a streak of distrust a mile wide and ten miles deep. Cynicism guides her every action, and her tough sense of survival gives her the means to do whatever is necessary to come out ahead. Think Liz Taylor in *Cleopatra*, Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*, Vivian Leigh in *Gone With the Wind*, Madonna in *Evita*.

**The SPUNKY KID:** gutsy and true, she is loyal to the end. She is a favorite of many writers, and for good reason. You can’t help but root for her. She’s the girl with moxie. She’s not looking to be at the top of the heap; she just wants to be in her own little niche. She’s the team player, the one who is always ready to lend a hand. Think Meg Ryan in *Sleepless in Seattle*, Melanie Griffith in *Working Girl*, Mary Tyler Moore in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Whoopi Goldberg in *Sister Act*, Fiona in *Shrek*.

**The FREE SPIRIT:** eternal optimist, she dances to unheard tunes. Playful and fun-loving, she travels through life with a hop, skip and a jump, always stopping to smell the flowers and admire the pretty colors. She acts on a whim and follows her heart, not her head. Think Jenna Elfman in *Dharma & Greg*, Lucille Ball in *I Love Lucy*, Alicia Silverstone in *Clueless*.

# Heroine Archetypes

**The WAIF:** a distressed damsel, she bends with the wind. She's the original damsel in distress. Her child-like innocence evokes a protective urge in the beastliest of heroes. But don't be fooled, because the WAIF has tremendous strength of will. She won't fight back; she'll endure. Think Judy Garland in the *Wizard of Oz*, Marilyn Monroe in *The Misfits*, Peta Wilson in *La Femme Nikita*, Demi Moore in *Ghost*, Halle Barry in *Monster's Ball*.

**The LIBRARIAN:** controlled and clever, she holds back. She's prim and proper, but underneath that tight bun lurks a passionate woman. Dressed to repress, she might be the know-it-all whose hand is always up in class, or maybe she is the shy mouse hiding in the library. Think Kathleen Turner in *Romancing the Stone*, Ellen Barkin in *The Big Easy*, Shelley Long in *Cheers*, Gillian Anderson in *The X-Files*.

**The CRUSADER:** a dedicated fighter, she meets her commitments. No shrinking violet, no distressed damsel, here. This lady is on a mission, and she marches right over anyone in her way. Tenacious and headstrong, she brushes off any opposition to her goal. Think Diana Rigg in *The Avengers*, Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*, Sarah Michelle Gellar in *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, Lucy Lawless in *Xena, Warrior Princess*.

**The NURTURER:** serene and capable, she nourishes the spirit. Not always Suzy Homemaker, this lady takes care of everyone. She is a wonderful listener, and a joy to have around, this heroine takes care of everyone. She's serene, capable and optimistic. Think Michelle Pfeiffer in *Ladyhawke*, Alicia Nash in *A Beautiful Mind*, Julie Andrews in *Mary Poppins*.

# My Story Can Beat Up Your Story!

## Character Grid

**Character #1 - The Hero**

Name:  (S)he is a:  ...tempered by:

Character Description:

His/Her defining VIRTUE is:

Except when...

# My Story Can Beat Up Your Story!

## Character Grid

The Character's name is: ***Something symbolic if possible***

(S)he is a: ***One of the Eight Cowden Archetypes (Hero or Heroine)***

...Tempered by: ***An ATTITUDE from the Eight Archetypes (Righteousness, Ruthlessness, Deflection, Protection, Loyalty, Reason, Emotion, Skepticism)***

The Character Description: ***A short, defining bio.***

His/Her defining VIRTUE is: ***One of the VIRTUES from [www.virtuesproject.com](http://www.virtuesproject.com)***

Except when...: ***Give EXCEPTION to the virtue***

Character #1 - The Hero

Name:  (S)he is a:  ...tempered by:

Character Description:

His/Her defining VIRTUE is:

Except when...

## THE VIRTUES

Adapted from [www.virtuesproject.com](http://www.virtuesproject.com)

### Assertiveness

Being assertive means being positive and confident. You are aware that you are a worthy person with your own special gifts. You think for yourself and express your own ideas. You know what you stand for and what you won't stand for. You expect respect.

### Caring

Caring is giving love and attention to people and things that matter to you. When you care about people, you help them. You do a careful job, giving your very best effort. You treat people and things gently and respectfully. Caring makes the world a safer place.

### Cleanliness

Cleanliness means washing often, keeping your body clean, and wearing clean clothes. It is putting into your body and your mind only the things that keep you healthy. It is staying free from harmful drugs. It is cleaning up mistakes and making a fresh start.

### Commitment

Commitment is caring deeply about something or someone. It is deciding carefully what you want to do, then giving it 100%, holding nothing back. You give your all to a friendship, a task, or something you believe in. You finish what you start. You keep your promises.

### Compassion

Compassion is understanding and caring when someone is hurt or troubled, even if you don't know them. It is wanting to help, even if all you can do is listen and say kind words. You forgive mistakes. You are a friend when someone needs a friend.

### Confidence

Confidence is having faith in someone. Self-confidence is trusting that you have what it takes to handle whatever happens. You feel sure of yourself and enjoy trying new things, without letting doubts or fears hold you back. When you have confidence in others, you rely on them.

### Consideration

Consideration is being thoughtful of other people and their feelings. You consider how your actions affect them. You pay careful attention to what others like and don't like, and do things that give them happiness.

### Cooperation

Cooperation is working together and sharing the load. When we cooperate, we join with others to do things that cannot be done alone. We are willing to follow the rules which keep everyone safe and happy. Together we can accomplish great things.

### Courage

Courage is bravery in the face of fear. You do the right thing even when it is hard or scary. When you are courageous, you don't give up. You try new things. You admit mistakes. Courage is the strength in your heart.

### Courtesy

Courtesy is being polite and having good manners. When you speak and act courteously, you give others a feeling of being valued and respected. Greet people pleasantly. Bring courtesy home. Your family needs it most of all. Courtesy helps life to go smoothly.

### Creativity

Creativity is the power of imagination. It is discovering your own special talents. Dare to see things in new ways and find different ways to solve problems. With your creativity, you can bring something new into the world.

### Detachment

Detachment is experiencing your feelings without allowing your feelings to control you. Instead of just reacting, with detachment you are free to choose how you will act. You use thinking and feeling together, so you can make smart choices.

### Determination

You focus your energy and efforts on a task and stick with it until it is finished. Determination is using your will power to do something when it isn't easy. You are determined to meet your goals even when it is hard or you are being tested. With determination we make our dreams come true.

### Diligence

Diligence is working hard and doing your absolute best. You take special care by doing things step by step. Diligence helps you to get things done with excellence and enthusiasm. Diligence leads to success.

# MSCBUYS Character Grid



The Character's name is: SAM PUCKETT -- *Manly name, with a last name that's suggestive of her attitude towards life.*

(S)he is a: *Boss*

...Tempered by: *Deflection*

The Character Description: *Sam is an aggressive, hot headed yet level-headed tomboy who loves pranks and hates working. She secretly has a heart of gold and a soft spot for Cat, but she'll threaten violence to anyone. Sam is not afraid of anything, and is handy at fighting or bossing her way out of any situation.*

His/Her defining VIRTUE is: *Assertiveness (Being assertive means being positive and confident. You are aware that you are a worthy person with your own special gifts. You think for yourself and express your own ideas. You know what you stand for and what you won't stand for. You expect respect).*

Except when...: *Cat's feelings are likely to be hurt.*



# Villain & Villainess Archetypes

## Eight Villain Archetypes

**The Tyrant**  
**The Bastard**  
**The Devil**  
**The Traitor**  
**The Outcast**  
**The Evil Genius**  
**The Sadist**  
**The Terrorist**

## Eight Villainess Archetypes

**The Bitch**  
**The Black Widow**  
**The Backstabber**  
**The Lunatic**  
**The Parasite**  
**The Schemer**  
**The Fanatic**  
**The Matriarch**

# Villain Archetypes

**The TYRANT:** the bullying despot, he wants power at any price. He ruthlessly conquers all he surveys, crushing his enemies beneath his feet. People are but pawns to him, and he holds all the power pieces. Hesitate before getting in this man's way – he'll think nothing of destroying you.

**The BASTARD:** the dispossessed son, he burns with resentment. He can't have what he wants, so he lashes out to hurt those around him. His deeds are often for effect – he wants to provoke action in others. He proudly announces his rebellious dealings. Don't be fooled by his boyish demeanor – he's a bundle of hate.

**The DEVIL:** the charming fiend, he gives people what he thinks they deserve. Charisma allows him to lure his victims to their own destruction. His ability to discover the moral weaknesses in others serves him well. Close your ears to his cajolery – he'll tempt you to disaster.

**The TRAITOR:** the double agent, he betrays those who trust him most. No one suspects the evil that lurks in his heart. Despite supportive smiles and sympathetic ears, he plots the destruction of his friends. Never turn your back on him -- he means you harm.

# Villain Archetypes

**The OUTCAST:** the lonely outsider, he wants desperately to belong. Tortured and unforgiving, he has been set off from others, and usually for good cause. He craves redemption, but is willing to gain it by sacrificing others. Waste no sympathy on him - he'll have none for you.

**The EVIL GENIUS:** the malevolent mastermind, he loves to show off his superior intelligence. Intellectual inferiors are contemptible to him and that includes just about everyone. Elaborate puzzles and experiments are his trademark. Don't let him pull your strings - the game is always rigged in his favor.

**The SADIST:** the savage predator, he enjoys cruelty for its own sake. Violence and psychological brutality are games to this man; and he plays those games with daring and skill. Run, don't walk, away from this man - he'll tear out your heart, and laugh while doing it.

**The TERRORIST:** the dark knight, he serves a warped code of honor. Self-righteous, he believes in his own virtue, and judges all around him by a strict set of laws. The end will always justify his nefarious means, and no conventional morality will give him pause. Don't try to appeal to his sense of justice - his does not resemble yours

# Villainess Archetypes

**The BITCH:** the abusive autocrat, she lies, cheats, and steals her way to the top. Her climb to success has left many a heel mark on the backs of others. She doesn't care about the peons around her – only the achievement of her dreams matters. Forget expecting a helping hand from her – she doesn't help anyone but herself.

**The BLACK WIDOW:** the beguiling siren, she lures victims into her web. She goes after anyone who has something she wants, and she wants a lot. But she does her best to make the victim want to be deceived. An expert at seduction of every variety, she uses her charms to get her way. Don't be fooled by her claims of love – it's all a lie.

**The BACKSTABBER:** the two-faced friend, she delights in duping the unsuspecting. Her sympathetic smiles enable her to learn her victims' secrets, which she then uses to feather her nest. Her seemingly helpful advice is just the thing to hinder. Put no faith in her – she'll betray you every time.

**The LUNATIC:** the unbalanced madwoman, she draws others into her crazy environment. The drum to which she marches misses many a beat, but to her, it is the rest of the world that is out of step. Don't even try to understand her logic – she is unfathomable.

# Villainess Archetypes

**The PARASITE:** the poisonous vine, she collaborates for her own comfort. She goes along with any atrocity, so long as her own security is assured. She sees herself as a victim who had no choice, and blames others for her crimes. Expect no mercy from her – she won't lift a finger to save anyone but herself.

**The SCHEMER:** the lethal plotter, she devises the ruin of others. Like a cat with a mouse, she plays with lives. Elaborate plans, intricate schemes; nothing pleases her more than to trap the unwary. Watch out for her complex designs – she means you no good.

**The FANATIC:** the uncompromising extremist, she does wrong in the name of good. She justifies her action by her intent, and merely shrugs her shoulders at collateral damage. Anyone not an ally is an enemy, and therefore, fair game. Give up any hope of showing her the error of her ways – she firmly believes you are wrong, wrong, wrong.

**The MATRIARCH:** the motherly oppressor, she smothers her loved ones. She knows what's best and will do all in her power to control the lives of those who surround her – all for their own good. A classic enabler, she sees no fault with her darlings, unless they don't follow her dictates. Don't be lured into her family nest – you'll never get out alive.

# Step #4: Know Your Archetypes

Your episodes are defined by: The Four Archetypes

**Orphan**

**Wanderer**

**Warrior**

**Martyr**

# The Four Archetypes

## 1. Orphan

**A situation casts the episode's main character out of the normal status quo**

## 2. Wanderer

**Main character sets out on a journey to restore the status quo**

## 3. Warrior

**Main character enacts failed plan(s) to restore the status quo**

## 4. Martyr

**Main or critical secondary character makes a sacrifice to restore the status quo.**

# Step #5: Know Your Episodic Structure

## The Cold Open/2 Act/Tag Structure

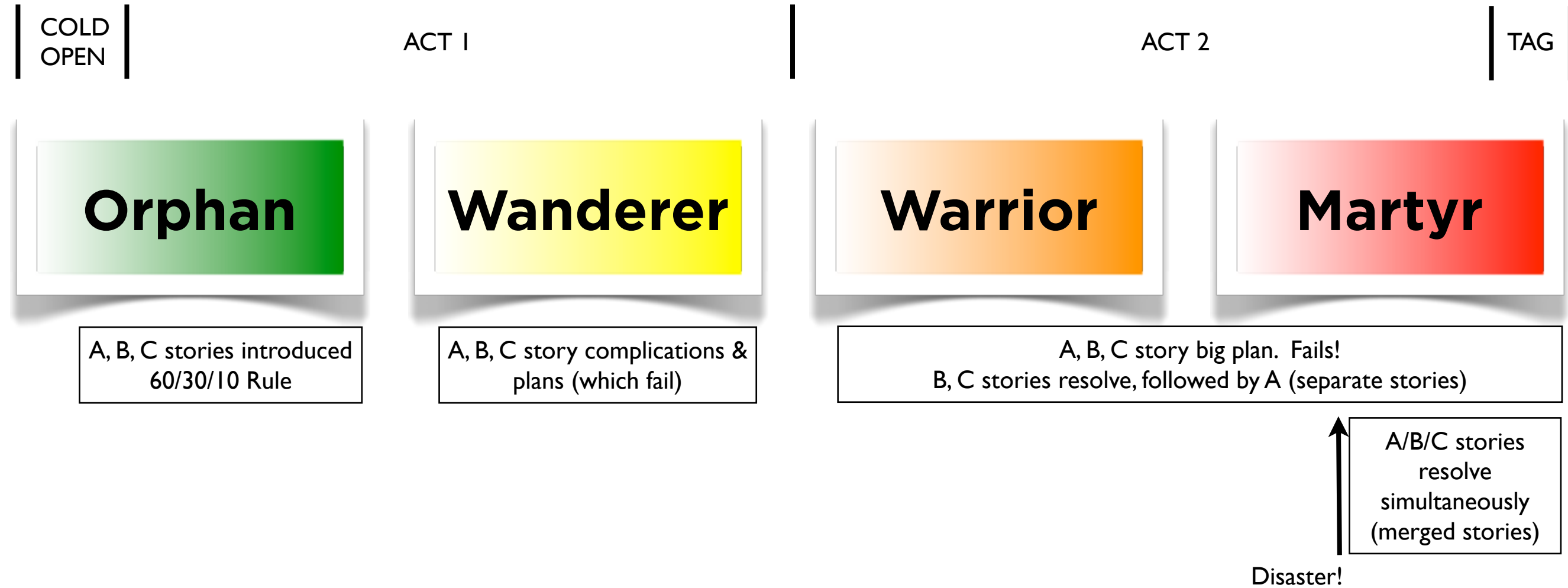
Cold Open - 2-4 pages  
Act One - 20-22 pages  
Act Two - 12-14 pages  
Tag - 1-2 pages

## 3 Stories

A, B, C - Separate  
A/B/C - Merged  
A/B, C - Hybrid  
A, B/C - Hybrid



# Episodic Structure & The Archetypes



# Structure Templates



# Step #6: Know Proper Format

1. No cheating on margins
2. Stick to page count
3. No typos
4. You **MUST** use a professional program and template such as Final Draft or Movie Magic Screenwriter.

# Proper Teen Sitcom Format

The Suite Life on Deck  
"Episode Title"

1.  
((CO))

## COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

EXT. SKY DECK - NIGHT (NIGHT 1)  
(BAILEY, ZACK)

THE HIGH SEAS HIGH BBQ IS STILL GOING ON. BAILEY IS SITTING AT THE JUICE BAR. ZACK ENTERS AND SEES BAILEY HAS HER HEAD IN HER HANDS.

BAILEY

Cold open dialogue here. If it goes to a second line, it's double-spaced.

ZACK

Really? That seems boring.

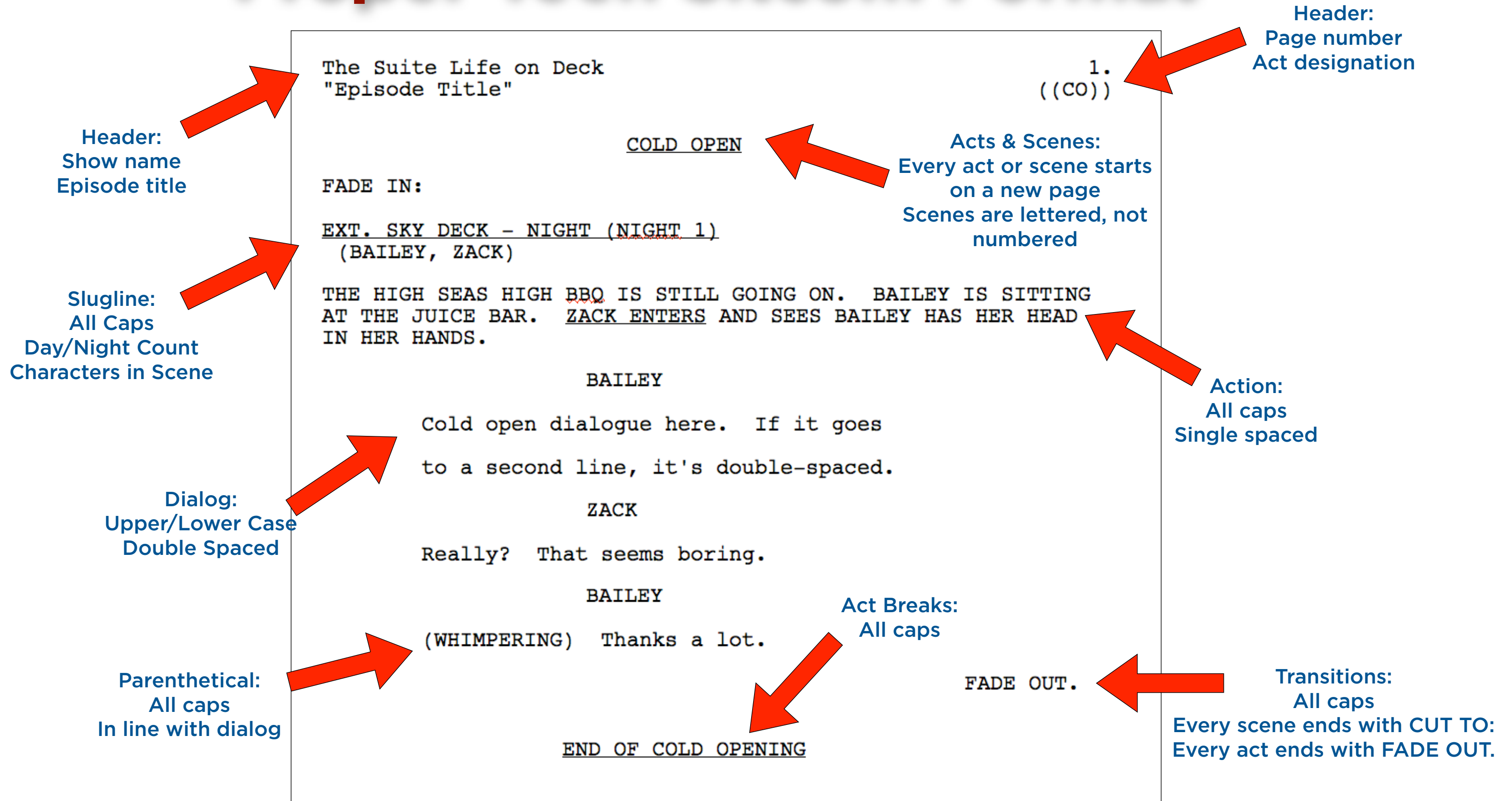
BAILEY

(WHIMPERING) Thanks a lot.

FADE OUT.

END OF COLD OPENING

# Proper Teen Sitcom Format



# Proper Teen Sitcom Format

Header: Show name Episode title

Header: Page number Act designation

Header: "Pilot" Date: 1/18/12

Header: 28. II/E

Header: Acts & Scenes: Every act or scene starts on a new page  
Scenes are lettered, not numbered

Slugline: All Caps Day/Night Count Characters in Scene

Header: Shooting Draft

ACT TWO

SCENE E

INT. WYATT'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT DAY (D-3)  
(Wyatt, Crash, Amanda, Chad, Jasmine, Naya [O.S.])

WYATT ENTERS. WYATT IS SITTING AT THE COMPUTER READING.

174

Action: All caps Single spaced Character action underlined

Dude, we are all over the Internet.

(READS) "Veg Out Cafe is the number one restaurant to avoid." Yeah!

We're number one!

WYATT STARTS DANCING.

175

Dialog: Upper/Lower Case Double Spaced

Parentetical: All caps In line with dialog

WYATT

How can you celebrate?

# Common Mistakes of Failed Teen Sitcom Pilot Scripts

- **It's hard to connect with them**
- **Too familiar**
- **Unoriginal**
- **Unappealing lead**
- **Bad casting opportunities**
- **Show creator ISN'T A FUNNY PERSON**



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