



ENTERTAIN

Story structure: **Save the Cat**

I have used this framework to help structure 90-minute workshops or long training sessions, because it's all about keeping an audience engaged and **ENTERTAINED**. Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat* framework was originally created for Hollywood screenwriters, but it contains a powerful lesson for business leaders: audiences stay engaged when information feels like a story. The framework breaks a narrative into memorable "beats" — moments of tension, surprise, conflict, emotion, setback, and resolution — which help sustain attention and create momentum. That is why communicators like Jensen Huang, Sir Ken Robinson, Brian Cox, and David Attenborough are so compelling. They rarely just present information. They take audiences on a journey. They create curiosity, raise questions, introduce obstacles, reveal discoveries, and build toward meaningful conclusions. For business leaders, this can transform a presentation from a static download of information into an experience people actually remember. A strategy update can feel like a mission. A product launch can feel cinematic. *Save the Cat* offers a practical structure to help leaders hold attention, and increase engagement.

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## Blake Snyder's Save the Cat

**Deck: 120 Slides or Film Script: 120 Pages**

0-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	25-30	31-36	37-42	43-48	49-54	55-60	61-66	67-72	73-78	79-84	85-90	91-96	97-102	103-108	109-114	115-120
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**Context:**

*Save the Cat* is a screenwriting term coined by **Blake Snyder** and refers to a particular plot device. The *Save the Cat* method involves having the protagonist do something admirable toward the start of the story in order to establish them as a likable person and get the audience on their side. 15 "beats" provide a framework that most showrunners and screenwriters when writing movies and TV shows.

**Business Application:**

While this may appear over-engineered for a business story, this is an ideal structure to use for seminars, workshops or training programs. This is because the "beats" are designed to keep an audience's attention for an extended amount of time (at least 1-2 hours); so a 90-minute workshop could be structured like a 90-minute movie (perhaps even treating each page of the script as a PPT slide).

Jeremy Connell-Walke (July 2024)

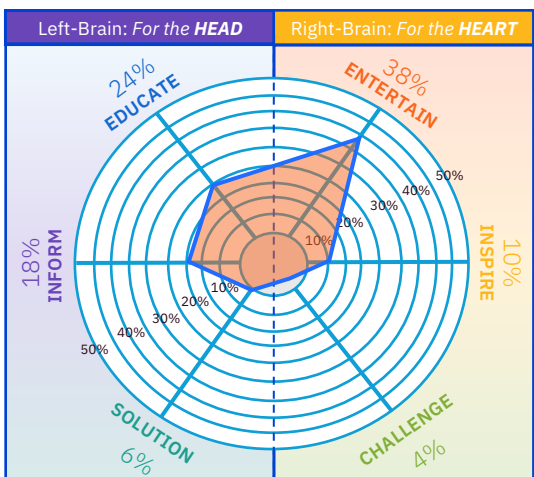
**Blake Snyder's Save the Cat "Beat Sheet"**

<https://save-thecat.com/beat-sheet/>

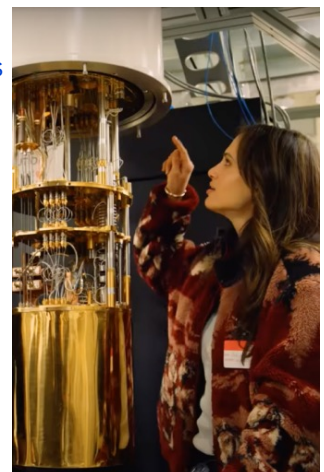
**Learn More:**

**Save the Cat**  
Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet

Example: **Quantum Computers, Explained with MKBHD by Cleo Abram (2023)**



Cleo Abram combines the curiosity of a science educator with the pacing instincts of a world-class digital storyteller. Her optimism about technology is contagious, but beneath that energy is a deep craft. Creating explainer videos at Netflix, and her *Huge If True* YouTube channel, taught her how to simplify complexity, sustain attention, create narrative tension, and reward curiosity every few seconds, which is exactly how audiences consume and retain information.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3fz3dqhN44>



## ENTERTAIN

### Neuroscience Notes:

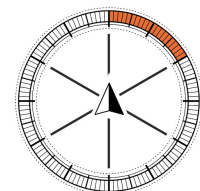
When we are truly entertained, the brain becomes intensely engaged both emotionally and attentively. Great entertainment captures one of the most precious resources humans possess: sustained attention. Instead of the mind wandering, the audience becomes psychologically immersed in the experience, a state researchers sometimes call “*narrative transportation*.” In this state, people temporarily lower their analytical guard and emotionally enter the world of the story. Neurologically, entertaining stories activate multiple systems simultaneously. Dopamine increases as the brain anticipates rewards, surprises, tension, humour, or resolution, especially when we desperately want to know what happens next. Emotional scenes can activate the limbic system, including the amygdala, helping experiences feel vivid and memorable. Humour may trigger reward circuitry and social bonding responses, while emotionally moving moments can release oxytocin, increasing empathy and human connection. This is why audiences may laugh together, cry together, or collectively hold their breath during moments of suspense.

Importantly, entertainment also increases memory retention. The brain is far more likely to remember experiences associated with strong emotion, novelty, tension, and pleasure than dry information alone. Emotion acts almost like a highlighter pen for memory. From an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense: emotionally charged experiences were often critical for survival and social learning. For storytellers, especially in business, this is incredibly important because entertainment is not the opposite of seriousness, it is often the gateway to attention, trust, and memorability. In a world of distraction, the communicator who can emotionally engage an audience has a profound advantage. When executives are entertained, they stop merely processing slides and begin experiencing ideas. And experiences are far more likely to change behaviour than information alone.

**Examples:** Cleo Abram’s YouTube channel “Huge if True”, David Attenborough films & COP speeches, Neil deGrasse Tyson’s interviews, Jacob Collier (MIT lectures & commencement speech), Mixture of Experts IBM podcast, Isabella Tree’s “Wilding” book and film, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie’s TED talks, Marlee Martin documentary, Shonda Rhimes masterclass, N.K. Jemisin’s science fiction writing, comedians such as Jerry Seinfeld, Sebastian Maniscalco, Hannah Gadsby (especially the opening to Douglas), Chris Rock.

#### Does your audience need to be ENTERTAINED?

- Are they mentally elsewhere?
- Have they heard similar messages too many times?
- Is attention the scarcest resource in the room?
- Does the audience need emotional re-engagement?
- Will they forget this unless it becomes memorable?



References: **Scientific Studies Relevant to the Neuroscience of Storytelling**

#### ENTERTAIN:

“Narrative Transportation Theory”, Green & Brock (2000)  
 “Neural Coupling Between Speaker and Listener”, Uri Hasson et al. (2010)  
 “Emotion Enhances Memory”, Cahill & McGaugh (1998)