



## Save-the-Cat Beat Sheet

Adapted from [Save the Cat! writes a Novel](#) by Jessica Brody

Dear Author,

Whether you are a plotter or a pantsler, if you are writing a book or want to write a book, this Save-the-Cat beat sheet can help you perfect your book into a truly compelling novel. If you are a plotter, use this before you write your first sentence to plot your course. If you are a pantsler, use this beat sheet between first draft and rewrites to check whether you've hit all the important beats at the appropriate times for proper pacing and hooks.

Note that the order and location of each beat can change slightly to better fit your story, but you *will* need to include all fifteen beats for a compelling novel. If you're unsure where to start, first determine the three main components of your protagonist (their biggest problem, want/goal, and need) to know what story they want you to tell. You may want to use my Character Bible Toolkit to help figure this out (see my [Tips for writers](#) article titled [writers Resources](#) for the free download). Then focus on developing the Five Foundation Beats (Catalyst, Break Into Two, Midpoint, Break Into Three, and All is Lost). With those beats locked in, the rest should practically fall into place.

If you haven't already, I highly recommend reading [Save the Cat! writes a Novel](#) by Jessica Brody to fully understand this beat sheet and get the best out of it.

For more information on the various beats of storytelling, read my [Tips for writers](#) article titled [The Heartbeat of Story](#).

Your editor,

*Mandi Summit*  
*Red Quill Editorial LLC*

*PS:* when you're ready for editing, [let's Discuss Your Manuscript](#) and secure your spot on Red Quill Editorial's calendar!



## Save-the-Cat Beat Sheet

### ACT I

(Beats 1 - 5) 0 - 20%

**The Thesis:** This act sets up your protagonist's status quo world before anything changes.

**1. Opening Image: (single-scene beat) 0 - 1%**

A visual that instantly hooks your reader and sets the tone, style, and mood of your novel.

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**2. Theme Stated: (single-scene beat) 5%**

A statement is made, typically by a supporting character, that voices your protagonist's greatest flaw and need for transformation. This lets the reader know what your book will be about (the life lesson your protagonist will learn by the end of the novel).

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**3. Setup: (multi-scene beat) 1 - 10%**

Reveals your protagonist's everyday life including their goals and motivations (wants/external goals); shows your protagonist at home, work, and play and includes the A-Story characters (those who currently exist within your protagonist's world); and exposes your protagonist's flaws and the things that need fixing.

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## ACT II

(Beats 6 - 12) 20 - 80%

**The Antithesis:** The upside-down version of your protagonist's status quo world of Act I. During Act II, they try to fix things the wrong way (wants/external).

### 6. Break Into Two: (single-scene beat) 20%

This is the point of no return where your protagonist determines to accept the challenge by stepping into a new world and way of thinking. This must be their *choice*.

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### 7. B-Story: (single-scene beat) 22%

The secondary story or a subplot that often involves love, friendship, or mentorship is introduced. This includes the B-Story character(s) whose purpose is to bring out your protagonist's flaws, make them *want* to change, and guide them in learning the theme (life lesson/point) of the novel.

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### 8. Fun and Games: (multi-scene beat) 20 - 50%

This is the biggest beat in your entire novel and focuses on delivering the "promise of the premise," often used in the blurb. Vary the action here with a "bouncing ball" narrative of up, down, up, down, etc., *but* ensure there is an overall direction toward either success or failure (a mostly upward or downward path). Show your protagonist either seemingly succeeding or failing in this new upside-down world as they pursue their goal (wants/external).

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- **Raise the Stakes:** This is the time to raise the stakes and increase the tension by adding a ticking clock, ramping up the love story, throwing in a surprise twist, or having the protagonist attend a big celebration.
- **A-Story Meets B-Story:** It's also necessary to have your A-Story (external) and B-Story (internal) intersect in some way here, offering a subtle shift from your protagonist's wants (external) to their needs (internal).

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10. **Bad Guys Close In: (multi-scene beat) 50 - 75%**

As the second largest beat of your novel, your protagonist will now follow the opposite trajectory from the Fun & Games beat. If they were on a mostly upward path before, they will now travel downward, or vice versa. Despite the overall trajectory, you should again use the "bouncing ball" narrative throughout this beat to keep your readers on their toes. Continually increase the stakes and tension as the bad guys close in and your protagonist heads toward the final showdown of the climax. Keep in mind that these bad guys can be literal or figurative; external or internal; a person, thing, or even a force—whatever is getting in the way of your protagonist reaching their goal.

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## ACT III

(Beats 13 - 15) 80 - 100%

**The Synthesis:** The brand-new world that is the fusion of your protagonist's status quo world of Act I and the upside-down version of Act II. In Act III, they finally figure out what they actually need to fix things the right way (needs/internal).

### 13. Break into Three: (single-scene beat) 80%

This is the breakthrough moment where your protagonist has a "Dark Night epiphany." Through reflection in the last beat, new information comes to light or something already in front of them becomes clearer. They finally learn the theme (life lesson) and understand how to fix things the right way.

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### 14. Finale: (multi-scene beat) 80 - 99%

This is the moment your reader has been waiting for: the big showdown between your protagonist and their nemesis (remember, this could be a person, thing, or force), after which your protagonist is completely transformed. For your novel to be compelling and really resonate with your reader, your protagonist must work hard for the win in this Finale (or if they fail instead, ensure there is a point or a life lesson to be learned from it). The Finale is an intricate beat and arguably the most important one of your entire novel. It's best broken down into five sub-beats.

**Sub-Beat 1 - Gathering the Team:** Your protagonist makes any necessary amends and gathers allies or tools to carry out their plan.

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**Sub-Beat 2 - Executing the Plan:** The plan is put into action. There is a sense of impossibility, while at the same time a growing sense of accomplishment as they make progress. If your protagonist gathered a team, they start to drop off (B-Story Sacrifice), because in the end, your protagonist must do this alone.

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**Sub-Beat 3 - The High Tower Surprise:** Curveball! Just when your protagonist believes they might succeed, something happens (another catalyst) to check their confidence and remind them it can't possibly be that easy.

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**Sub-Beat 4 - Dig Deep Down:** Your protagonist reacts to the catalyst of the last sub-beat by altering their plan and determining what to do next. Through the major flaw your protagonist had to overcome, they now provide proof that they've changed by taking a leap of faith and deciding to do something they never would have done at the beginning of the story (theme/life lesson).

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**Sub-Beat 5 - Executing the New Plan:** Your protagonist puts their altered plan into action, proving once and for all that they are transformed for the better. They have earned their victory.



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15. Final Image: (single-scene beat) 99 - 100%

Opposite to the Opening Image, the Final Image is one last view of your now-transformed protagonist living their new life in their newly fused Act III world. This mirror image reflects exactly how much your protagonist has grown since the opening of the novel.

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~~~ End of Act III ~~~

THE END.