NaNo Prep 101

A six-week workshop and resource guide

Plot Method: Save the Cat! Beat Sheet

The Save the Cat! Beat Sheet was originally developed by Blake Snyder to help screenwriters plot movies, but it works just as well with graphic novels and, of course, novels. It breaks down the three-act structure into small, specific sections (sometimes just one scene long!). Each section pushes your story forward in its own way. The exact word count/page count of each section depends on how long your novel is and what type of story you're telling, but you can use the colored chart below and the percentages we've included in the instructions as a kind of guide.

Context Note: This method is based on the concept of the Three Act Structure, which is an inherently Western approach to plot. It can be a useful way to tell a story, but it is by no means the only one, and we've overemphasized it in the past. NaNoWriMo aims to expand the resources we offer writers, and we encourage you to explore other approaches in the meantime. We think Matthew Salesses's book Craft in the Real World is a good place to start.

Final Image — 1.0%
Finale — 19.0%
Break Into 3 — 1.0%
Dark Night of the Soul — 4.0%
All Is Lost — 1.0%
Bad Guys Close In — 23.0%
Midpoint — 1.0%
Fun and Games (with B Story) — 29.0%
Break Into 2 — 1.0%
Debate — 9.0%
Catalyst — 1.0%
Set Up (with Theme Stated) — 9.0%
Opening Image — 1.0%
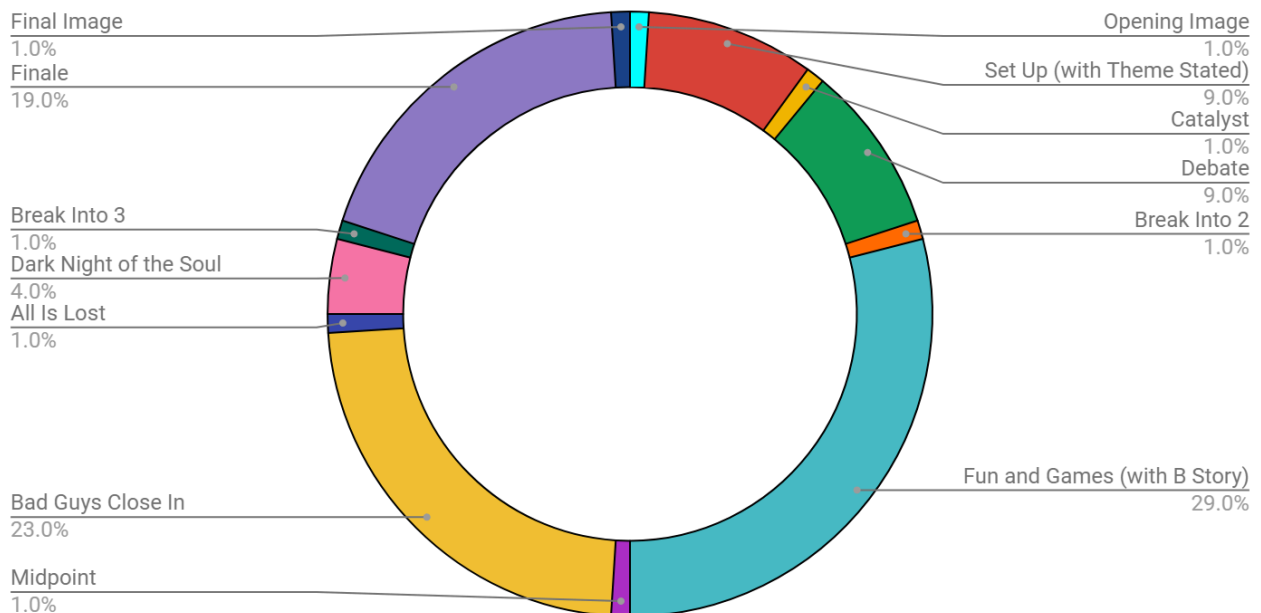
Fill in each block below with your ideas for each section. Don't write your whole novel here - just jot down general ideas for sections and scenes, like "Javiar's in elevator when earthquake hits" and "Molly fights with sister - chases down taxi."

ACT 1

1. **Opening Image (0-1%)** – Show a "before" snapshot of your protagonist and their world. What is life like before the adventure begins?

2. **Set-up (1-10%)** – Keep showing that ordinary "before" world. Explore your protagonist's life, including the internal flaws and external challenges they'll have to overcome in order to change for the better by the end of the story. Also introduce important supporting characters.

3. **Theme Stated (happens during the Set-up)** – Somewhere in your set-up, include a scene where a character says something that hints at what the protagonist's big life lesson will be - how they'll have to change and grow by the end of the story. The protagonist won't understand the lesson until later, though.

4. **Catalyst (10%)** – This is when life-as-they-know-it changes forever! There's no going back to the "before" world from here… What is the inciting incident that pushes the protagonist into the next phase of the story?

5. **Debate (11-20%)** – But change is scary! Show the protagonist questioning themselves and resisting the path ahead - wondering whether they have what it takes, or whether or they should just run home and hide under the bed. This is their last chance to chicken out. "Should I just…?" "I really shouldn't because…" "But what about…"

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ACT 2

6. **Break Into 2 (20%)** – Your protagonist answers the call! They make the choice to begin their adventure/transformation/journey/new thing. Show your protagonist deciding to plunge into Act 2.

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7. **The Promise of the Premise/ Fun and Games (21-50%)** – This is when the reader thinks "Ah, now we're getting to the good stuff they hinted at on the back cover of this book!" It's also one of the longest sections in your book. Show your protagonist getting used to their new world - loving it, hating it, making mistakes or doing well, meeting new people (see more below) and keeping the reader entertained.

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8. **B Story (happens during The Promise of the Premise)** – Introduce a new character or characters who will eventually help the protagonist learn their life lesson. Friends? Mentors? Love interests? Nemeses (nemesi?)? Who are they? How will they help?

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9. **Midpoint (50%)** – This moment is when everything seems "great" or everything seems "awful," depending on your story. Either the Fun and Games section has lead to a false victory for your protagonist (they think they've been doing great so far) or a false defeat (they've been having a hard time so far). What happens in this moment, halfway between beginning and end?

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10. **Bad Guys Close In (51-75%)** – Get ready for a bumpy ride. If your Midpoint was a false victory, now things start to go wrong for your protagonist. If the Midpoint was a false defeat, well, things seem to be looking up, but the bad guys are getting closer and will have something to say. Note: Bad guys can be actual physical enemies, but they can also be emotional enemies, like doubt or jealousy or fear. Show the protagonist's

newly-built world beginning to unravel. (This will also be one of the longer sections in your novel).

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11. **All is Lost (75%)** – Oh, dear. This is when something happens to make your character hit rock bottom. It's the absolute lowest part of your novel. Maybe someone or something dies (either literally or figuratively). What does this moment look like for your protagonist?

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12. **Dark Night of the Soul (76-80%)** – Your protagonist now has time to react to their "All is lost" moment, to mourn what they lost and wallow in hopelessness. Yeah, it's not pretty. They're worse off than they were at the beginning of the novel. Show how low things have gotten.

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ACT 3

13. **Break Into 3 (80%)** – The "aha!" moment; the "lift yourself up and try again" moment. Show the protagonist realizing what they need to do in order to tackle their problems, both external and internal.

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14. **Finale (81-99%)** – The protagonist does what they decided to do in the Break Intro 3 beat, and (because of all the learning/growing they've done and the support or insight from the B Story), their plan works! The Bad Guys are defeated, the world is changed for the better. What are the battles? How will the protagonist triumph (or not)? This is another longer section, so you've got the space to make things dramatic and intense!

[ ]

15. **Final Image (99-100%)** – This is the opposite of the Opening Image, the "after" snapshot instead of the "before." Show the reader how the protagonist and their world have changed!

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