

Developing Characters

Beat, Objective, Obstacle, Tactic and Stakes

TERMS:

1. **OBJECTIVE:** The character's goal/what the character wants. Characters without much depth may have only one objective and use only one method to achieve their objective. However, complex characters might have several objectives, including moment-to-moment objectives. And they might use many different tools and methods to achieve the overall objective, often referred to as the "**super-objective.**" Objectives should be discussed in first-person terms. Use "I want. . ." phrasing when discussing your character's objective.
2. **OBSTACLE:** What is preventing the character from achieving his or her objective. What's in the way. According to Ivana Chubbuck: "Obstacles are anything and everything that get in the way of your objectives. They exist both internally (your character's/your own psychological makeup) and externally (the other characters/actors, the environment). Obstacles give power and intensity to your objective by making your goal harder to accomplish."
3. **BEAT:** A unit of thought or subject matter in a monologue or scene. Beats are discoveries made by actors or directors. As a rule, beats shift when a character's motivation or routine changes. As you read the text, ask yourself, "Did the mood of the scene just change?" If the answer is yes, you have probably discovered a beat.
4. **TACTIC:** What the character is doing to get what he or she wants. A strategy. Always an action word (see next page for a list of tactics). The character may/can use a different tactic in each beat.
5. **STAKES:** The level of risk. Should be discussed in terms of what is the **best** thing that could happen if the character successfully achieves his or her objective and what is the **worst** thing that could happen if the character fails. High stakes = high risk = great drama and clear motivation. If the stakes are low (if he or she does not stand to gain or lose much), then why would the character even bother?

TACTICS (aka Acting Verbs)

Abolish	Baffle	Command
Abuse	Beckon	Commend
Accept	Beg	Conceal
Acquaint	Beguile	Condemn
Acquit	Belittle	Condescend
Address	Berate	Confide
Affirm	Beseech	Confirm
Afflict	Bewitch	Confuse
Affront	Bid	Consider
Aid	Blame	Correct
Ail	Bribe	Criticize
Alarm	Cajole	Crucify
Alert	Catch	Crush
Allow	Caution	Curse
Amaze	Censure	Damn
Amuse	Challenge	Dare
Anger	Charge	Deceive
Anticipate	Charm	Defame
Approach	Cheat	Defy
Astound	Chide	Delight
Attack	Clarify	Deny
Baby	Coax	Detect

4NG Fanatics

Deter	Frustrate	Mortify
Devastate	Gladden	Motivate
Direct	Goad	Mystify
Discourage	Hassle	Nag
Disgrace	Help	Negotiate
Disgust	Hoodwink	Obliterate
Displease	Humble	Offend
Distress	Humiliate	Oppose
Divert	Humor	Panic
Dominate	Hurt	Perplex
Ease	Hypnotize	Persecute
Educate	Imitate	Placate
Elevate	Implicate	Plan
Enchant	Indict	Please
Endear	Indulge	Pledge
Enlighten	Insinuate	Pontificate
Entertain	Inspire	Pray
Entice	Insult	Press
Entreat	Judge	Prod
Evade	Lecture	Promise
Excuse	Liberate	Promote
Exploit	Lure	Propel
Force	Manipulate	Propose
Free	Mislead	Prosecute

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Provoke	Scold	Terrify
Quench	Scrutinize	Thwart
Ravage	Settle	Tickle
Rave	Shame	Torment
Rebuke	Slur	Torture
Rectify	Spoil	Trick
Reiterate	Startle	Trouble
Reject	Strike	Tyrannize
Rejoin	Study	Unburden
Release	Stymie	Understand
Relegate	Substantiate	Uproot
Remedy	Suffer	Urge
Renege	Suggest	Vacillate
Repel	Summon	Validate
Reprehend	Supplicate	Verify
Repress	Support	Victimize
Reprimand	Suppress	Vindicate
Repulse	Surprise	Warn
Resist	Swindle	Wheedle
Retract	Tantalize	Woo
Revolt	Tarnish	Worry
Ridicule	Tease	Worship
Scheme	Tempt	Wrangle

4NG Fanatics

SOURCE INFORMATION

*Huntington Theatre Company
Avenue of the Arts & South End
In Residence at Boston University*

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