



# ELA Virtual Learning

# **Creative Writing**

May 6, 2020



## Creative Writing

### Lesson: Wed., May 6

**Objective/Learning Target:** Students will study the structure of one of the most popular forms of storytelling today: the television sitcom.



## Creative Writing

**Warm-up:** Read p. 217 from [Story by Robert McKee](#). (You will likely need to download this and right-click to rotate.)

**Lesson:** In it, he discusses how beats--or “changing patterns of human behavior”--build scenes. Scenes build sequences, which develop the plot and, therefore, the story’s overall structure. Understanding the structure of a sitcom is the first step toward writing an effective script.



## Creative Writing

**Lesson:** Let's start small. In [this scene from \*The Big Bang Theory\*](#), three friends watch anime together. As you watch the clip, make note of its beats (again, the “changing patterns of human behavior”). How do characters *react* to elements in the scene, and how do those reactions both (1) create comedy and (2) move the story forward?



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**Lesson (cont'd):** It's probably not lost on you that the scene itself is interested in "changing patterns of human behavior." Nevertheless, we see that Sheldon's motivation is clear--to change Penny. The comedy arises both from his attempts (and Penny's seeming willingness) as well as Leonard's struggle to maintain his principled stance regarding Penny's authenticity when confronted with "building a better girlfriend."



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**Lesson (cont'd):** These beats construct the scene, a series of actions and reactions that are logical, deliberate, and consequential. In other words, they “forward” the story through conflict and tension!

We can imagine Leonard’s dilemma (whether or not to allow Sheldon to continue) leading toward a *turning point* in the episode: the “choice a character makes under pressure to take one action or another in the pursuit of a desire.”



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**Practice:** For this exercise, view and "deconstruct" an episode of a television show (I encourage a 30-minute sitcom, or you could simply use the one you chose from the lesson on Monday!), recording the running time of each scene as well as a brief summary. (Remember: scenes are typically structured by location.) This will help us identify the series' typical act structure and component parts (scenes, plot points, etc.).



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**Model:** [The Simpsons \(Mr. Gall's model\)](#)





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### **Additional Practice/Resources:**

[How to Become a Television Comedy Writer](#)

[Screenwriting Glossary](#)

[Screenplay Formatter Add-On for Google Docs](#)