

Dear screenwriter,

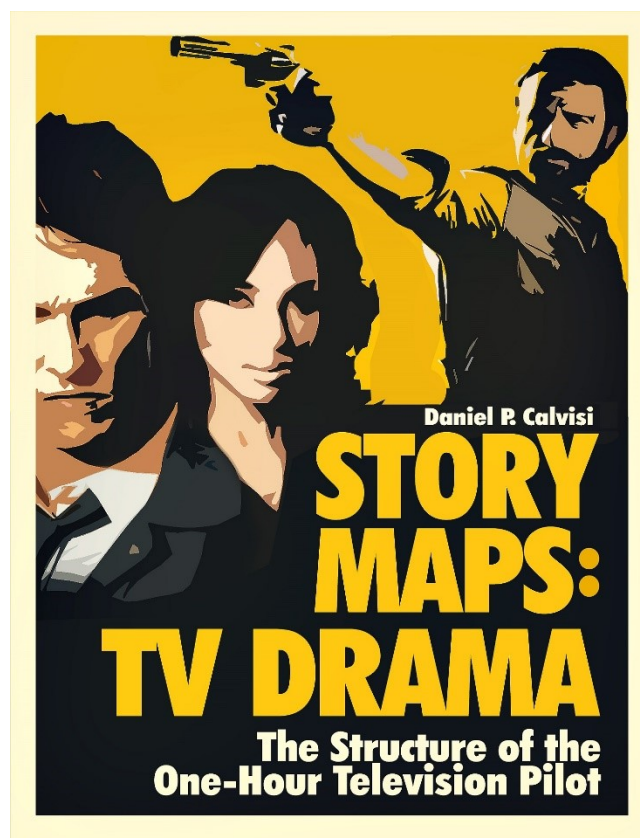
The Story Map beat sheet below uses a method of structure that I developed over years of analysis, described in detail in my book, **STORY MAPS: TV DRAMA: The Structure of the One-Hour Television Pilot**. I highly encourage you to purchase the book so you can better understand the meaning of each of the dramatic elements listed below. It's not enough to just look at a list of the titles of these elements – you must learn how to put them into action.

The book also includes full beat sheets for the pilots of **The Walking Dead, Mad Men, Breaking Bad, Game of Thrones, Mr. Robot** and **True Detective**.

If you have not already acquired the book, you can purchase it in PDF format with a bonus worksheet at ActFourScreenplays.com, or at Amazon in both Kindle and Paperback format.

Good luck and happy Writing,

Dan Calvisi





SCANDAL

“SWEET BABY” PILOT

Written By Shonda Rhimes

Scandal is a great example of a major network drama. A strong female protagonist leads a dynamic ensemble in a hybrid procedural/serial format that incorporates a “case of the week” with longer arcs of story and character. The Compelling Crisis is familiar—a Washington, D.C. “fixer” is called in on various assignments as her own personal life spins out of control—but the execution is fresh, or, at least, top-notch. It’s just gritty enough to work in ABC’s 9 P.M. slot, but sans the nudity and violence of HBO fare.

Shonda Rhimes’ script is an incredibly tight pilot that pretty much does everything right, and in only 45 minutes, making it the shortest of our sample pilots. It introduces every major character *in action* (even the two-person dialogue scene that opens the pilot is thrilling and suggestive of movement as our “Newborn” Quinn is offered a high-stakes job and told she has to decide in the moment). We see this high-stakes world in action in the very next scene as we meet Olivia Pope, our hero, standing up to gangsters and negotiating successfully for a mystery package, which in a great reveal is soon shown to be a baby. The Teaser ends with a man entering Olivia’s office, bloody, saying he didn’t kill his girlfriend. This is six minutes in and we’ve already launched the A, B and D story. As you can see below in the beat sheet, the pilot is front-loaded, with both Catalyst and Inciting Incident occurring in the six-minute Teaser. Interestingly, in an early draft of the script, Sully enters on page 12. As with many effective rewrites, the Inciting Incident was moved up so as to get the story moving as soon as possible. In a pilot, the first few minutes cannot be more important—millions are watching and looking for reasons to turn the channel, maybe to never tune in again. The clock is ticking.

But a well-executed procedural is not enough to make it in today’s fractured TV landscape. A new drama needs a *noisy* hook, and that’s exactly what Shonda Rhimes injected into this story. What really makes this pilot shine is the “C” story, which begins as a case that sounds familiar and cliché: a sex scandal with the President of the United States and his intern. But although we get some effective scenes of Olivia investigating the case, the true turn in the “C” story occurs in Act Four and will have ramifications well

beyond the pilot: Olivia and President Grant are former lovers...and he wants her back. This is a textbook “Shadow Showdown” beat.

I particularly like how the theme shifts and sharpens late in the episode with a deft mix of scene order, subtext, and dramatic mirroring – what was once a story about secrets and lies becomes a tale of true love.

Scandal may not be one of your go-to shows, but I urge you to watch the pilot. Watch and learn.

TEASER

1-2 **OPENING (“B”)**: In a bar, QUINN gets a surprise job interview by HARRISON to work for the famous Olivia Pope. They are not a legal firm. They are the good guys. Harrison makes Quinn repeat these words: “I want to be a gladiator in a suit.” (“B” story: Quinn’s first day on the job)

[QUICK TITLE: *Scandal*]

3-4 **CATALYST**: In a dark warehouse, OLIVIA POPE talks to her handsome employee STEPHEN about him proposing to his girlfriend (“D” story: Stephen’s proposal). Olivia boldly transacts a shady business deal with Russian mobsters, convincing them to take half the money they asked for: \$3 million. They back down, hand her the package and she leaves.

5-6 Back at Olivia’s office, newbie Quinn meets the team. They all ignore her. Quinn watches in awe as Olivia hands the package off to her happy clients, the Russian Ambassador and his wife: it’s their baby! She successfully negotiated with Russian gangsters to return their kidnapped baby to them.

6 **INCITING INCIDENT**: LT. COL. SULLIVAN “SULLY” ST. JAMES walks into the office, covered in blood. His girlfriend was just killed, and the police think he did it. (“A” story: Proving Sullivan’s innocence) FADE OUT.

ACT ONE

7-10 **WORLD**: Sullivan’s background and the “rules” of Olivia Pope’s practice. Olivia narrates a montage that shows their process – Olivia always goes with her gut. Her one rule to Sully: “Don’t lie.”

Olivia and her TEAM go into action.

15-16 **TURN**: CYRUS comes to Olivia with a new job. Intern making sexual allegations against Fitzgerald Grant, the President of the United States. (“C” story: The President and his intern.). **DECISION**: Olivia demands to look in his eyes.

ACT TWO

16-17 **AFTERMATH**: Check-in with Stephen and his proposal. Abby is secretly in love with Stephen. Quinn finds key evidence, proving herself a **Dynamic Ally**.

18-19 **FIRST TRIAL**: At Camp David, Olivia and PRESIDENT FITZGERALD GRANT. He denies, she studies him...takes the case.

20 New evidence, care of Abby: Sully’s deceased girlfriend Paige was having an affair. This presents an **“A” ROADBLOCK** as it points to motive for Sully to kill her.

20-21 **FIRST CASUALTY**: Quinn tags along with Olivia to the park. Olivia intimidates AMANDA TANNER, the President’s intern. Quinn is troubled (**“B” ROADBLOCK**). Olivia walks away, makes a quick call, saying “It’s handled.” But is it?

ACT THREE

22-24 **AFTERMATH:** Quinn sobs in the bathroom, HUCK helps her. No crying—Olivia doesn't believe in it! ("Crying" setup)

24 Olivia still trying to get a bead on Grant. Questioning her gut.

MIDPOINT ("A" STORY): BOMBHELL: Sully's prints are on the gun!

25-28 **COMPLICATIONS:** Sully comes clean — he knew about Paige's affair and he reveals that he picked up the gun after finding her body.

Olivia shows diamond engagement rings to Stephen. He chooses one. Olivia: "Good choice."

ROADBLOCK: Cops storm in to arrest Sully. Olivia negotiates with the head cop to give them 40 minutes. (Ticking Time Clock)

29-32 **TURN:** Sully is gay. But he will not come out, even though his alibi is that he was with his male lover at the time of the murder. "I'm a hero. I can't be gay." He is arrested.

IMPOSSIBLE CHOICES: For Sully, he can go to jail for a crime he didn't commit or ruin his honor and career. For Olivia, she can honor her client's wishes and lose his case or win his case and ruin his life.

Quinn reports that Amanda Tanner is in the hospital after a suicide attempt.

ALL IS LOST on the A, B and C lines.

ACT FOUR

33-34 **AFTERMATH:** Reviewing details of the case, "taking stock." Olivia hears "Sweet baby." She storms off.

35-38 **ASSUMPTION OF POWER & SHADOW SHOWDOWN:** Olivia confronts President Grant in the Oval Office. She knows he slept with Amanda, because Olivia used to be his "sweet baby!" He betrayed her trust, made her question her gut. She tries to resist his advances, but she can't and he kisses her. Cyrus catches them.

39-40 **INTEGRATION:** Still shaken from the Oval Office, Olivia watches Stephen propose to his girlfriend and she accepts. (End "D" story) Olivia cries ("Crying" payoff).

41-42 **DECLARATION OF WAR:** Olivia visits Sully in a jail cell in one last push to convince him to give her the name of his lover, to come clean and claim his alibi. (THEME SHIFTS: The episode is now about true love.) She is a mirror to Sully, in that they both have a secret love that jeopardizes their career and tears them up inside. She begs him to reveal the truth and we know that she's also trying to give herself the courage to admit to her love for the President.

ACT FIVE

42 **CLIMAX (“A”)**: Sully admits he’s gay in a press conference. He is acquitted of all charges. (End “A” story)

43-44 **EPILOGUE/NEW WORLD**: The team wraps up evidence for the police. Quinn is now a member of the team. **CLIMAX (“B”)**: She says it and she means it: “Gladiators in suits.” (End “B” story)

44-45 **CLIMAX (“C”)**: Olivia delivers a bombshell to Cyrus: Amanda Tanner just became her client! She’s taking on the President of the United States, her former lover. (End “C” story)

CLIFFHANGER: How can she win against the President? Has Sully given her the strength to reveal the truth to the world about her own affair?