

Scene Beat Example

I have taken this scene from the movie “Chinatown” to use as a guide on how to break down your script into BEATS.

The simplest way to find a scene beat, is to read through the scene and mark the sections where the action changes or where the dialogue direction (or meaning) changes.

This is my version of the beats of this scene. Go through this scene yourself and see how many beats you come up with (you could have more - or less.)

NOTE: There are no hard and fast rules for finding the beats in a scene. With practice, you will discover how to find the beats in a scene that you need.

NOTE: **Beat 1 (B1)** always starts at the beginning of the scene.

“CHINATOWN”

9 INT. DUFFY AND WALSH'S OFFICE

B1 Walsh rises when Gittes enters.

WALSH
Mrs. Mulwray, may I present Mr.
Gittes?

Gittes walks over to her and again flashes a warm, sympathetic smile.

GITTES
How do you do, Mrs. Mulwray?

MRS. MULWRAY
Mr. Gittes...

B2 GITTES
Now, Mrs. Mulwray, what seems to
be the problem?

She holds her breath. The revelation isn't easy for her.

MRS. MULWRAY
My husband, I believe, is seeing
another woman.

Gittes looks mildly shocked. He turns for confirmation to his two partners.

GITTES
(gravely)
No, really?

MRS. MULWRAY
I'm afraid so.

GITTES
I am sorry.

B3 Gittes pulls up a chair sitting next to Mrs. Mulwray -- between Duffy and Walsh. Duffy cracks his gum.

Gittes gives him an irritated glance.
Duffy stops chewing.

B4 MRS. MULWRAY
Can't we talk about this alone,
Mr. Gittes?

GITTES
I'm afraid not, Mrs. Mulwray.
These men are my operatives and
at some point they're going to
assist me. I can't do everything
myself.

MRS. MULWRAY
Of course not.

B5 GITTES
Now -- what makes you certain he
is involved with someone?

Mrs. Mulwray hesitates. She seems uncommonly nervous at the question.

MRS. MULWRAY
-- a wife can tell.

Gittes sighs.

B6 GITTES
Mrs. Mulwray, do you love your
husband?

MRS. MULWRAY
(shocked)
... Yes of course.

GITTES
(deliberately)
Then go home and forget about it.

MRS. MULWRAY
-- but...

GITTES
(staring intently at
her)
I'm sure he loves you, too. You
know the expression, let sleeping
dogs lie? You're better off not
knowing.

MRS. MULWRAY
(with some real
anxiety)
But I have to know.

Her intensity is genuine. Gittes looks to his two
partners.

B7 GITTES
All right, what's your husband's
first name?

MRS. MULWRAY
Hollis. Hollis Mulwray.

GITTES
(visibly surprised)
-- Water and Power?

Mrs. Mulwray nods, almost shyly. Gittes is now casually
but carefully checking out the detailing of Mrs.
Mulwray's dress -- her handbag, shoes, etc.

MRS. MULWRAY
-- he's the Chief Engineer.

DUFFY
(a little eagerly)
-- Chief Engineer?

Gittes' glance tells Duffy Gittes wants to do the
questioning. Mrs. Mulwray nods.

B8

GITTES

(confidentially)

This type of investigation can be hard on your pocketbook, Mrs. Mulwray. It takes time.

MRS. MULWRAY

Money doesn't matter to me, Mr. Gittes.

Gittes sighs.

GITTES

Very well. We'll see what we can do.