

John August + Craig Mazin's Screen Conflicts

T H E R E A R E S I X T Y P E S O F C O N F L I C T

Argument: This conflict takes the form of a physical fight or a verbal dispute.

Struggle Against Circumstance: Something happens to a character out of his or her control. This conflict can easily be used as the story's overarching conflict. Take the movie Castaway for instance.

Unfulfilled Desire: The character wants something that he doesn't have. This conflict works well at both a scene level and a story level. The challenge with this conflict is to externalize the conflict—to create the screen action that reveals the character's inner turmoil. The worst thing you can do is to have the character explain it as if the audience is the character's therapist.

Avoiding a Negative Outcome: The character has to figure out how to do something, but has to do it in a way that doesn't get him hurt. This is a classic situational comedy conflict.

Confusion: The character lacks information. Think the classic, “who am I,” “where am I” situations. The character feels lost. This conflict doesn't last long in a story though. Consider The Matrix and The Bourne Identity as examples.

Dilemma: The character has to make a choice, but all the options are bad. These conflict feel really genuine. BUT, this isn't a story level conflict. It's a conflict best kept for moments within a scene.