

ESSENTIAL ACTION CHEAT SHEET

The Essential Action is the character's goal within a scene; it's what they want. When we use this want to craft the story event for the Story Grid spreadsheet, we're usually looking at the point of view character. The Essential Action within a scene should be consistent with the character's Object of Desire, or their story goal. The Object of Desire is the macro, and Essential Action, the micro. The character might choose a wide range of tactics to pursue what they want, but the want stays the same except at critical turning points in the story.

If you're not sure what the Essential Action is for the scene you're reviewing, look to the Inciting Incident. It upsets the status quo, causing a desire to arise within one or more of the characters. From that desire comes a goal, and that goal is the character's Essential Action.

Below is a list of Essential Action phrases culled from various Practical Aesthetics sources. It's meant to help you begin thinking about what the characters want within a scene. It is by no means exhaustive, and you're free to make up your own.

The key to an Essential Action phrase is to make it as broad as possible. You can substitute characters' names for "someone," "a friend," etc., and expand the phrases to a whole sentence: "Jordan wants to get Aaron on her team," for instance. But the idea is to find the most universally understandable essence of the character's desire in the scene.

To get someone on my team

To lay down the law

To draw a dividing line

To get my due

To retrieve what is rightfully mine

To get someone to see the big picture

To enlighten someone to a higher understanding

To tell a simple story

To get to the bottom of something

To close the deal

To get someone to throw me a lifeline

To let someone down easy

To get someone to admit a betrayal

To put someone in their place

To get someone to open up

To put someone on the right path

To bring someone down to earth

To make a love bond

To get someone to back my crusade

To get someone to face reality

To burst someone's bubble

To get someone to accept a simple truth

To get someone to loosen or lighten up

To get someone to loosen me up

To get someone to give me what I deserve

To get someone to respect my boundaries

To get absolution

To get crucial guidance

To get someone to take me under their wing

To help someone see their own ridiculousness

To get someone to heed my warning

To get someone to come clean

To get a friend to divulge a secret

To boost someone's self-confidence

To gain a friend's trust

To urge a friend to take a big chance or risk

To gain a sibling's sympathy

To beg for a friend's help

To force a friend to face their problems

To lead a friend astray

To steer a friend away from the truth

To console a lost sheep

To get someone to respect my beliefs

To seek a potential ally's support

To get someone to respect my boundaries

To get a jerk off my back

To make a lover accept a change in our relationship

To get a loved one to take care of me
To get a sibling to empathize with me
To seek a friend's advice
To buy someone's silence
To get a lover to share my dream
To get a friend to give me a break
To force someone to see the error of their ways
To get a friend to grow up
To get a loved one to let me go
To get someone to admit their guilt
To force a stranger to apologize
To get a co-worker to do my bidding
To make a deal
To get a compromise
To get someone to meet me halfway
To make a truce
To get someone to accept my help
To get someone to take my hand
To get someone to put their faith in me
To get a chance
To get a fair shot
To get forgiveness
To get reassurance
To get a promise

To get a commitment
To get an ironclad guarantee
To knock someone off their high horse
To get what's owed me
To get an apology
To get someone to play by my rules
To teach a simple, important, or serious lesson
To get someone off their behind
To get someone to grow up
To get someone to stand on their own two feet
To get the truth
To get a confession
To get a straight answer
To get a favor
To get help
To get someone to bail me out
To get someone to rescue me
To sell a great idea
To get someone to seize a great opportunity
To get someone to rise to the challenge
To get someone to take a dare
To make a deal
To make a truce
To give someone the cold shoulder

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Learn more at www.StoryGrid.com

Sources

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