

D.C.

A NORMAL EPISODE

D.C. differs from many current dramas in that it doesn't have a conventional genre structure. There's no body found, no murder to be solved, no trial, no verdict, no monster to be slain. And yet there is closure on each episode. While some arcs will continue across multiple hours, by and large each show should stand on its own.

Here's a way of thinking about the structure.

THE A-PLOT

Each episode of D.C. has an Issue or an Idea at its core, such as gun control, abortion rights or justice. The A-Plot is a physical manifestation of this Idea or Issue, as it relates to one or more of our lead characters.

In the teaser or early in the first act, one of our characters encounters the situation that will become the A-plot: a Supreme Court case, a constituent problem, a news story, a personal crisis, etc. The spine of the episode is how this character and his or her housemates actively confront and resolve this situation.

Thus while it would be impossible to resolve an abstract idea like truth, it is possible for the characters to resolve a specific situation that deals with the truth, as Sarah does in episode 2.

As Dick will say, the ideal episode of D.C. should have five perspectives on the Issue or Idea, and we should see our characters debate. But debate alone is not enough — our heroes must actively drive the A-Plot. They must have personal stakes in the resolution of the situation.

THE B-PLOT

If the A-Plot is the brains of the show, the B-Plot is the heart.

While the A-Plot will tend to focus on characters in their working life, the B-Plot will usually center on the characters at home. It should explore the interactions between several of our five heroes, and comment specifically on the experience of being in your early 20's.

The B-Plot should have an emotional echo of the A-Plot Issue or Idea.

This is not as difficult as it seems, because any properly-explored A-Plot should offer a myriad of choices. For example, if the Issue is gun control, the B-Plot could focus on safety, freedom, empowerment, etc.

Note that the B-Plot is not synonymous with the overall story arcs that carry from episode to episode. The B-Plot begins and ends within the episode. It need not have a perfect, tidy conclusion, but we need to feel some progress was made.

THE COMIC RUNNER

With rare exceptions, there should be something funny in every episode. The comic runner involves one or more of our characters, at work or at home. Ideally, it should also carry an echo of the A-Plot, and intersect other story lines so as not to feel like part of a different show.

More than anything, it should be funny, which is why the less said, the better.

A NOTE ON PERSPECTIVE

In D.C., we only know what our five heroes know. This means that one of our five leads must be in every scene. Yes, this makes it more difficult to write. That's life.

For the record, yes, it's okay to have Lucy the dog wander around in scenes by herself, or let one of our characters walk into a scene that's already started. But the principle holds.