narrative summary

Pulp Fiction is divided into five distinct parts:

- Prologue
- Vincent, Vega and Marcellus Wallace's Wife
- The Gold Watch
- The Bonnie Situation
- Epilogue

The Prologue includes the discussion about Pumpkin and Honey Bunny about holding up the diner and their decision to do so. Vincent and Jules go to the flat where their man Marvin is waiting to give them a briefcase for Marcellus.

Vincent Vega and Marcellus Wallace's Wife contains Butch taking the bribe from Marcellus, Vincent buying and sampling the heroin, Vincent's date with Mia, Mia's overdose, and Butch's dream before the fight.

The Gold Watch has Butch cheating Marcellus by winning the fight. Butch takes flight then returns to his apartment to recover the gold watch that had belonged to his father. Butch kills Vincent, who is waiting at the apartment to kill Butch. Butch runs into Marcellus outside the apartment and after a fight they are taken captive by Maynard and Zed. Marcellus is raped before Butch can rescue him. Marcellus repays the rescue by letting Butch go.

The Bonnie Situation returns to the collection of the briefcase and takes up the story from there. Vincent and Jules have a narrow escape from death and Jules is convinced that it was through divine intervention. Vincent and Jules murder the three young men in the apartment. In the car Marvin is accidentally shot in the face and killed by Vincent. Winston Wolf is called in by Marcellus to clear up the 'mess.'
Monday:
- Vincent and Jules drive to Brett's apartment.
- They enter Brett's apartment at about 07:22.
- Vincent and Jules go to Jimmie's.
- Marvin is accidentally shot dead in the car.
- At 08:40, Winston Wolf isn't contracted.
- At 08:49, Winston Wolf arrives at Jimmie's.
- After cleaning up, Vincent and Jules go to the Hawthorne Grill to eat.
- Vincent and Jules leave the dinner.
- At about 10:00, Butch is being bribed by Marsellus at Sally LeRoy's.
- Vincent and Jules arrive at Sally LeRoy's.
- Vincent confronts Butch at the bar.
- The dance contest at Jack Rabbit Slim's.
- Vincent and Mia go home.
- Mia overdoses on heroin.
- Mia is revived at Lance's.
- Roger and Brett are murdered.

Tuesday:
- Vincent and Jules wake up and realize that Butch's watch has been left at his apartment.
- Butch goes back to his apartment to collect his watch.
- Vincent receives Butch's watch.
- Butch and Fabienne wake up and realize that Butch's watch has been left at his apartment.
- Butch and Fabienne visit the police station.
- Vincent and Mia go home.
- Mia overdoses on heroin.
- Mia is revived at Lance's.
- Butch and Marsellus are captured by Maynard in the Mason-Bixby pawn shop.
- Marsellus is raped by Maynard's friend Zed.
- Butch and Marsellus are captured by Maynard in the Mason-Bixby pawn shop.
- Butch kills Maynard and rescues Marsellus.
- Butch returns to Fabienne and they escape.

Wednesday:
- Butch wins the fight and escapes in Homarelda's cab.
- Butch has rendezvous with Fabienne at River Glen Hotel.
- Butch and Fabienne wake up and realize that Butch's watch has been left at his apartment.
- Butch goes back to his apartment to collect his watch.
- Butch murders Vincent.

Thursday:
- Butch heads back to the motel and meets Marsellus on the way.
- They fight.
- Butch and Marsellus are captured by Maynard in the Mason-Bixby pawn shop.
- Marsellus is raped by Maynard's friend Zed.
- Butch kills Maynard and rescues Marsellus.
- Butch returns to Fabienne and they escape.
narrative summary

confused time lapse

To make a summary of Pulp Fiction is a challenging project unless the internal logic of the film is acknowledged, and the authority of that logic is respected. Mapping a movie that does not adhere to the conventions of classic Hollywood narrative requires a slightly different approach which can be graphically explained as shown on pp. 16–17.

Why Tarantino chose to make the film using a fractured narrative technique is a less important consideration than exactly how he broke up the narrative. It is arguable that, as Pulp Fiction is a parody of the Hollywood gangster movie, Tarantino decided to make a similar parody of the classic Hollywood narrative form as well, and in doing so he also created a new genre, the postmodern gangster movie. As we shall see later, confused time lapse and setting is a recognisable feature of many films that may be regarded as postmodern.

To explore the final cut in detail it is useful to reconstruct the fractured narrative, reverting Pulp Fiction to a classic Hollywood linear narrative. The events in the film take place in a film time continuum starting at about seven in the morning. The key events happen in the following sequence:

linear narrative summary in film time

8 Vincent and Jules travel by car to collect a briefcase from 'our guy'.
8 Vincent tells Jules that Marsellus has told him to take Mia, his new wife, out to dinner that evening.
8 They arrive at the apartment at 7.22 a.m., during further discussion of Mia.
8 They collect the briefcase and its mysterious contents from the apartment, shooting dead three men, one of whom was discovered hiding in the bathroom. A fourth man, Marvin (referred to as 'our man') they take away with them.
8 On the journey back to their boss Vincent accidentally shoots Marvin in the face at point blank range killing him instantly, and making a gruesome mess of himself, Jules and the interior of the car.

8 Jules suggests that they divert to the house of a friend to dispose of Marvin's body. Jules's friend, Jimmie, is willing to help them but is alarmed because his wife, Bonnie, is due to return from work in about an hour and a half. It is now 8.17 a.m.
8 Jules calls Marsellus for help. Marsellus calls Winston Wolf (The Wolf) asking him to sort the situation out.
8 Wolf arrives and with method and discipline shows Vincent, Jules and Jimmie how to carry out their task.
8 Now without their bloodied suits, dressed comically in tee-shirts and shorts, Jules and Vincent go to the Hawthorne Grill, a nearby diner, for breakfast.
8 During Jules and Vincent's breakfast Honey Bunny and Pumpkin, who had been planning to rob the diner and its customers, spring the hold-up.
8 While terrorising and robbing customers Pumpkin comes to Jules (Vincent is in the washroom) and demands to see what is in the briefcase. Jules uses the opportunity of showing him to pull a gun and threaten Pumpkin. During a triangular stand-off with pistols poised, Jules convinces Pumpkin and Honey Bunny to make do with the spoils robbed from the other diners and $1500 of his own money. The situation is resolved and Vincent and Jules leave the diner.
8 In a bar where Marsellus is waiting for Jules and Vincent, Butch Coolidge is being bribed by Marsellus to throw a fight. Butch agrees and takes the money.
8 As Butch is leaving, Jules and Vincent arrive to deliver the briefcase to Marsellus. Butch and Vincent have a short and significant menacing exchange.
8 Vincent is becoming apprehensive about his appointment with Mia.
8 Vincent visits Lance, his supplier, to buy heroin. He buys a particularly pure variety that is packaged in the way that cocaine is normally wrapped.
8 Having sampled the 'choco' heroin Vincent goes to collect Mia for their date. Mia and Vincent go to eat at Jack Rabbit Slim's. Mia insists that they enter a twist contest, which they win.

PULP FICTION

linear narrative

dressed comically in tee-shirts and shorts

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PULP FICTION
linear narrative

double-crossing Marsellus

Back at her apartment, while Vincent is in the bathroom, Mia finds Vincent's 'choke' heroin and mistaking it for cocaine, snorts a line. The overdose leaves her unconscious, and on finding her Vincent bundles her into the car to take her to Lance's for an antidote.

At Lance's there is panic that results in the decision to inject adrenaline directly into Mia's heart to revive her. A syringe is plunged through her sternum, she is injected, and she revives.

Back home again, Mia and Vincent agree that the disastrous overdose must not be revealed to Marsellus.

During the same evening as Mia and Vincent's date Butch has a dream while he is relaxing before the fight which he has been bribed to throw in the fifth round. The dream is of the gold watch, a family heirloom that was delivered to him by Captain Koons.

Butch wakes and goes on to win the fight, double-crossing Marsellus. Butch effects his escape in a taxi driven by the strange Esnareida.

Butch returns to the motel where his girlfriend Fabienne is waiting for him ready to make the escape from the murderous wrath of Marsellus.

The next morning Butch and Fabienne are preparing to bolt when Butch discovers that she has not collected the gold watch from the apartment with the rest of their things. Butch flies into a rage, then decides to take the tremendous risk of returning to collect it.

It is mid-morning when Butch stalks up to his apartment where he can reasonably assume someone will be waiting for him to avenge the double-cross on Marsellus. The apartment is apparently empty, until Butch sees a machine pistol on the kitchen worktop.

Vincent appears from the bathroom expecting the returning visitor to be Marsellus and not Butch. Butch shoots Vincent dead with the machine pistol.

Butch flees from the scene in Fabienne's car, and at a nearby crossroads he confronts Marsellus on a pedestrian crossing. Butch runs Marsellus down then crashes the car. Marsellus and Butch are both injured, but Marsellus chases Butch with a gun.

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narrative & form

fractured narrative

robbing different sorts of shops

Butch runs into a pawn shop hoping to trap Marsellus. He succeeds and they start to fight, only to be stopped at gunpoint by the shopkeeper Maynard, who takes them captive in the basement. Maynard tells him his friend, Zed.

Butch and Marsellus are gagged and bound to chairs by the time Zed arrives. It is decided that Marsellus is the first to be (as we later learn) raped and he is taken away to an adjoining room. Butch manages to remove his bonds and overcomes the bizarre 'Bing' who is supposed to be watching over him. Choosing a weapon from the store he decides to rescue the unfortunate Marsellus from his attacker. During the rescue Butch kills Maynard. After promising torture for Zed, Marsellus tells Butch that he is free to go, but nobody must hear about the rape.

Butch takes Zed's chooper bike and returns to collect Fabienne, then rides off with her on the pillon.

When film is converted back into classic Hollywood narrative it is quite simple and conventionally readable. On closer inspection, some seams and incontinuities are visible, but this is inevitable because the film was not made using the classic Hollywood linear narrative.

fractured narrative summary in film time

PROLOGUE

The action opens after a caption showing the American Heritage Dictionary (New College Edition) definition of the term Pulp Fiction.

Honey Bunny and Pumpkin, a couple in their late twenties, are sitting in the Hawthorne Grill having coffee. They are discussing the relative profitability of robbing different sorts of shops and public places. Both are tense and appear to be reassuring each other that the perverse logic of their reckoning is sound. It soon becomes clear that the 'next job' is the diner they are in, the Hawthorne. With chilling and predictable spontaneity they launch into the hold-up. The frame freezes as they leap onto the table pointing their guns at the diners.