

COURSE WORKBOOK:

Screenwriting Masterclass: A Complete Guide to Screenwriting



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Introduction

Recommended software:

- Final Draft (30-days trial)
- Celtx (30-days trial)
- Movie Magic Screenwriter

WRITE EVERY DAY

Exercise 1

Write down 5 movies that inspire you.

Recommended film list:

- (500) Days of Summer
- Bridesmaids
- Casablanca
- Fantastic Mr. Fox
- Fargo
- Finding Nemo
- Get Out
- Groundhog Day
- Inglourious Basterds
- Lady Bird
- Little Miss Sunshine
- Paddington
- Planes, Trains and Automobiles
- Ratatouille
- Shaun of the Dead
- The Social Network
- When Harry Met Sally
- Whiplash

Originality in Screenwriting

- Distinguish yourself - have your unique approach
- Understand story
- Watch a lot of movies - educate yourself
- Think about the way you think about yourself

Core Components of an Original Story

- 1) Moral Truth
 - choose a moral truth, your worldview, to aim to prove through your story
- 2) Premise
 - “what will your story be about” will give a shape to the moral truth
- 3) Original Hook
 - this will make your story distinctly your own

Learning from Examples:

- Have a message
- Keep it simple
- Make it personal
- Make it original



When Harry met Sally (1989)

1) Moral Truth

- A platonic friendship between a man and a woman is destined to end in love or failure.

2) Premise

- Tell the story of a relationship between a man and a woman over multiple years as it fluctuates between friendship and romance.

3) Original Hook

- It hinges the entire story on the single question: "Can a man and woman be just friends?"

(500) Days of Summer (2009)

1) Moral Truth

- True love is always beyond your own control.

2) Premise

- Over the course of 500 days, showcase ups and downs of a relationship in which one person is more in love than the other.

3) Original Hook

- The time-frame, non-linear fashion

Shaun of the Dead (2004)

1) Moral Truth

- No obstacle is too great to overcome for love.

2) Premise

- A hapless man nearing 30 must prove to his girlfriend that he can grow up and be a better man for her, or else risk losing her forever.

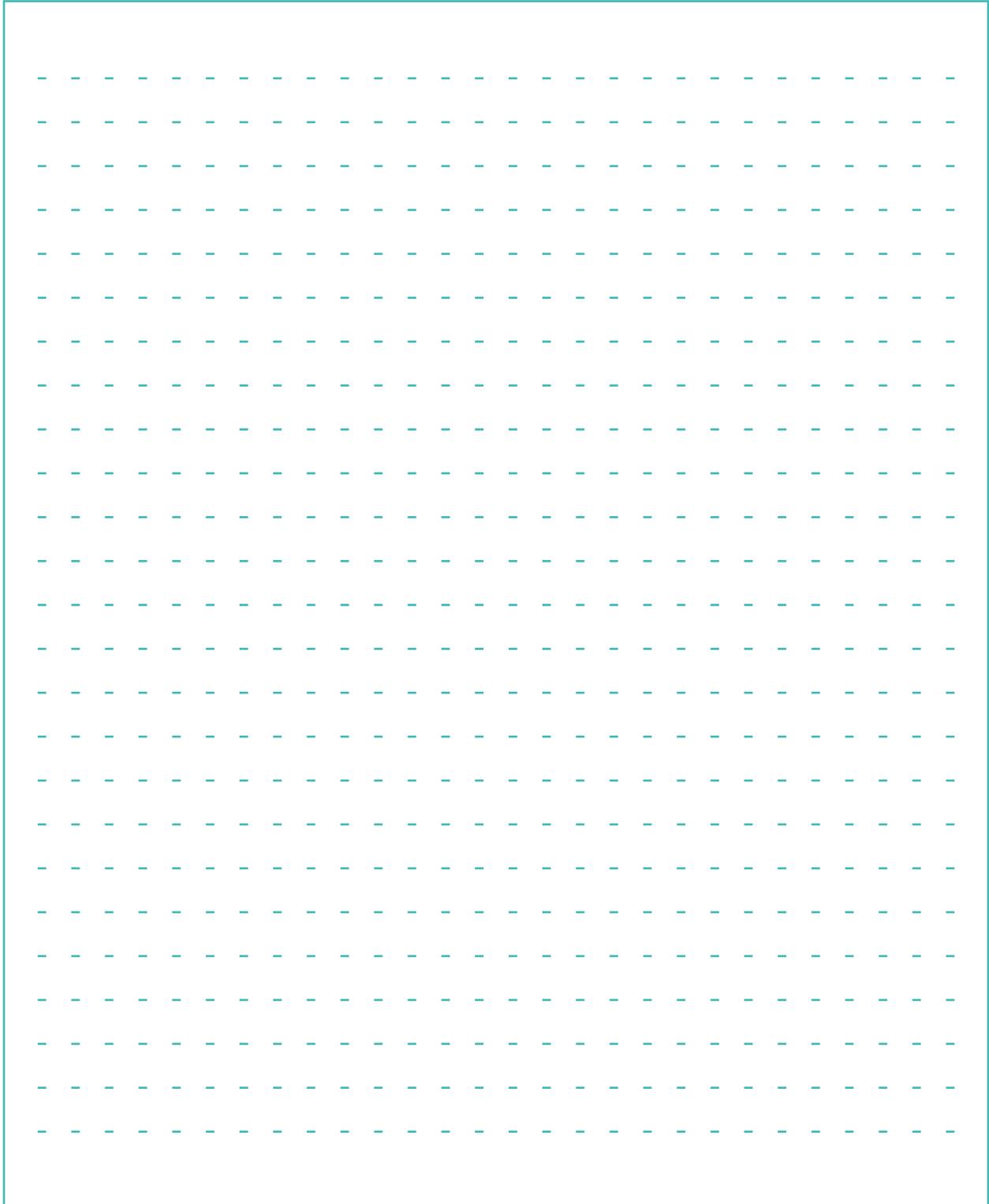
3) Original Hook

- Setting

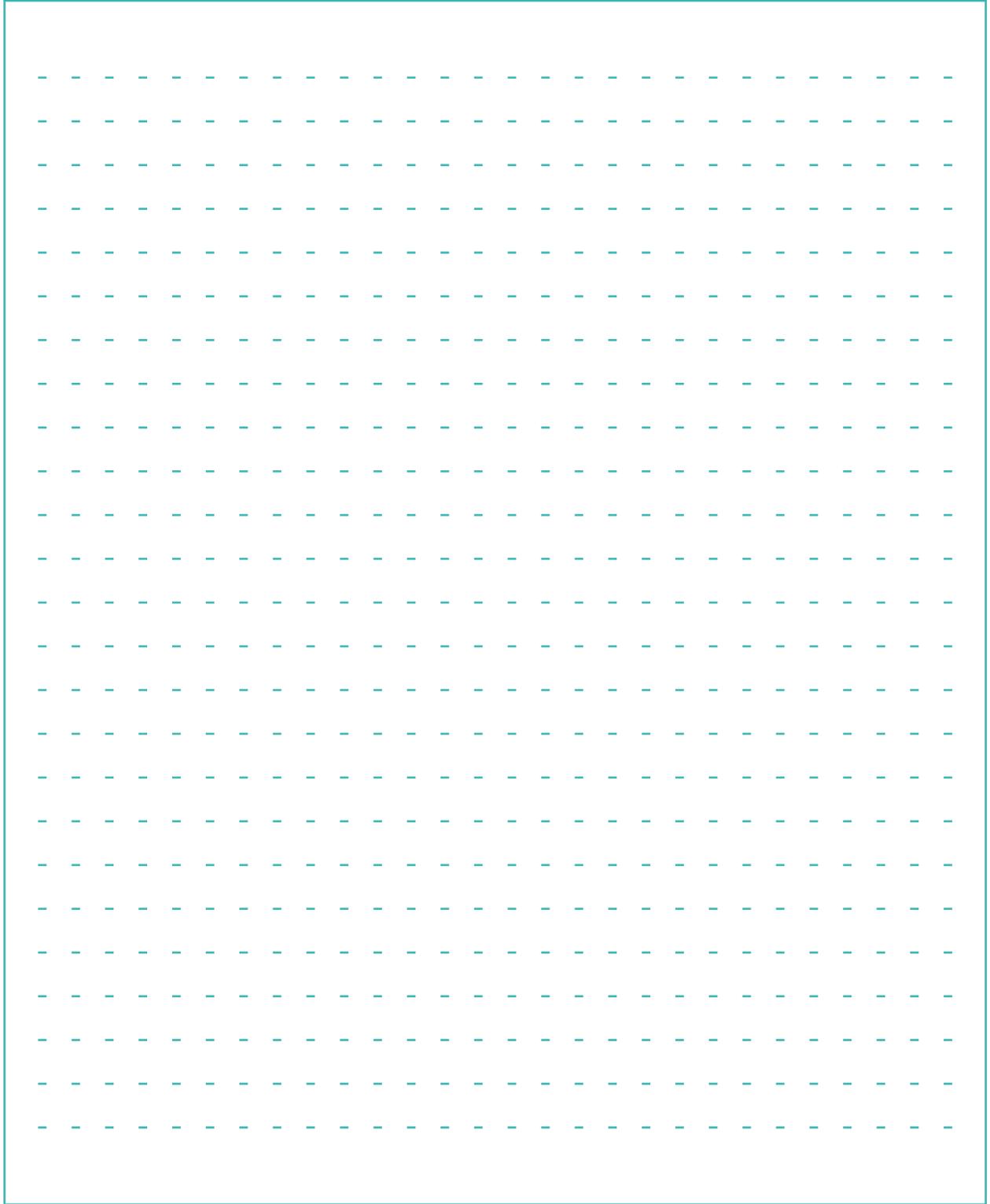
Exercise 2

What is about the movies (Ex.1) that inspire you to want to write?

Make a list of 25-50 items that come to your mind that interest you.



A large rectangular box with a teal border, containing a grid of horizontal dashed lines for writing. The grid consists of 25 rows of dashed lines, providing a structured space for the student to list 25-50 items of interest.



Finding Ideas for your Screenplay

HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

Having a message in a film is often misconstrued as being “preachy”. This only occurs in poorly written films.

YOUR MORAL TRUTH IS YOUR ROADMAP

It provides the two poles of your story:
The beginning and the end. Your Premise and Original Hook will shape the way those ends connect.



Bridesmaids (2011)

1) Moral Truth

- True friends will always, ultimately, bring out the best in you.

2) Premise

- A down on her luck single woman is asked to be the maid of honour at her best friend's wedding, only to find herself competing for the position with another bridesmaid.

3) Original Hook

- The first female ensemble comedy of its kind

Little Miss Sunshine (2006)

1) Moral Truth

- Breaking free from conventional beauty standards and societal expectations is the only way to be a winner..

2) Premise

- A divided family embarks on a roadtrip to bring their young daughter to a youth beauty pageant in California..

3) Original Hook

- Setting, great characterization.

Get Out (2017)

1) Moral Truth

- Racism is a horror unlike any other.

2) Premise

- A Black man meets his white girlfriend's parents for the first time at their country home, only to discover these people are not what they seem..

3) Original Hook

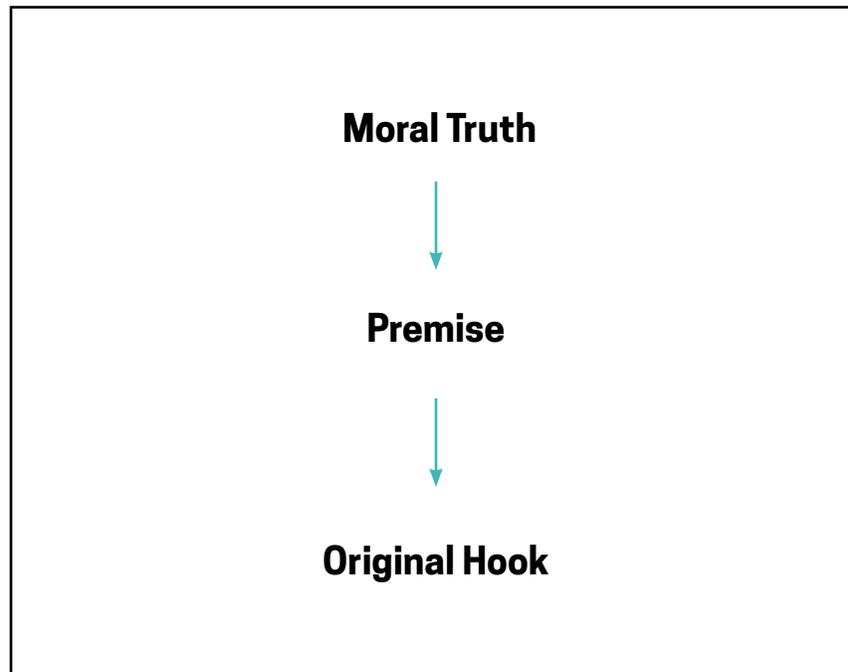
- A story that explores racism's horrors in an actual horror film.

Exercise 3

Write down your Moral Truth (be specific, thoughtful, clear and concise).



Developing your Story



Step1 - Understand what your moral truth tells you

find the two poles

- beginning (gifted protagonist become a hero)
- end (hero will be willing to sacrifice for something bigger than self-interest)

Step 2 - Find the Conflict

character goes through a change, what protagonist takes from the journey (internal and external forces)

Step 3 - Craft your Premise

find a setting for character and conflict

One Moral Truth

“To be a true leader, a hero must be willing to sacrifice for the greater good”

Many Premises

Shared: character, setting, conflict

Different: different story > unique impact

Star Wars (1977)

A young farmer learns that he belongs to a rare order of powerful warriors, and as such, is the greatest hope in the Rebel force's fight against the oppression of the most formidable warrior of the same order to ever live.

Harry Potter (1997 > 2001)

Premise: When a young boy learns he is a wizard and is sent to a 7-year school for others like him, he soon discovers that his destiny is to stop an extremely powerful evil wizard's reign of terror at any cost.

The Dark Knight (2008)

Premise: Bruce Wayne's only hope at protecting Gotham from a terrorists reign is to ensure, at any cost, that the people of his city have a hero in which they can place their faith and believe in the greater good.

Exercise 4

Finalize your Premise and find your Original Hook.



Character Development for Screenwriters

Protagonist

The hero of your story.

Antagonist

The main opponent preventing your protagonist from reaching their goal.

Supporting characters

The character has something in stake in the protagonist's mission, and help or hinder.

CHARACTER BEFORE STORY



A protagonist:

- Have a “want” that drives the story
- Faces a serious opposition, is at disadvantage
- Is sympathetic for the audience
- Is flawed
- Has something vital at stake
- Is the best character to prove your moral truth

Ratatouille (2007)

Wants:

Remy wants to be a world renowned chef.

Serious disadvantage:

Remy is a rat, so his dream is impossible.

Sympathetic:

Not only are rats seen as pests, especially in the kitchen of world-renowned restaurants, but his dream is misunderstood by his fellow rats and makes him an outsider in both the world he lives and the world in which he aspires to live. Yet he can't give up.

Flawed:

Remy is so desperate for his dream, that he is willing to put himself and his family in danger to achieve it.

Something at Stake:

If Remy is caught in the process, he could be exterminated.

PROTAGONISTS SHOWCASE ORIGINALITY

A antagonist:

- Have the same “want” as your protagonist, which cause the battle
- Exploits your protagonist’s biggest flaws
- Is not always evil
- Faces a serious opposition, is at disadvantage
- Is sympathetic for the audience
- Is flawed
- Has something vital at stake

Whiplash (2014)

Protagonist:

Andrew Neiman

Want:

To be one of the greatest jazz drummers of all time.

Plan:

Get into Fletcher’s band at the conservatory

Exploited Flaw:

His willingness to succeed at any cost.

Counterattack:

Has Fletcher expelled

Climax:

Andrew falls into Fletcher’s trap when he invites him to perform at JVC.

End:

Overcomes the trap and achieves his goal.

Antagonist:

Fletcher

Want:

To discover and train the greatest jazz musicians of all time.

Plan:

Abuse and berate Andrew to push him to his limits... and his fullest potential

Primary Attack:

Threaten to replace Andrew, then follow through on that threat.

Climax:

Sets a trap for Andrew, uses his weakness to exploit it.

End:

Andrew proves he has it in him to be one of the greatest drummers of all time.



A supporting character:

- Is integral to overall story, helps or hinder your protagonist
- Is somehow linked to your antagonist
- Should have mission of their own

Star Wars

Han Solo, Princess Leia, Obi Wan, Yoda

Harry Potter

Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger

3D characters

It shapes your character's worldview, circumstance and core flaw.

- 1) Psychology
- 2) Physiology
- 3) Sociology

Exercise 5

Physiology

Sex:

Age:

Height and Weight:

Colour of hair, eyes, skin:

Posture:

Appearance:

Defects:

Heredity:

Sociology

Class:

Occupation:

Education:

Home:

Religion:

Race, nationality:

Place in community:

Political affiliations:

Hobbies:

Psychology

Moral Standards:

Ambition:

Regrets, disappointments:

Temperament:

Attitude toward life, philosophy:

Extrovert, introvert:

Abilities, talents:

Qualities, values:

Intellect:

Screenplay Story Structure

The Three Act Structure

1) Act One

- Beginning of the story.
- Includes inciting incident, 1st major plot point.
- Generally pages 1-30

2) Act Two

- The middle of the story.
- This is the heart of your protagonist's battle for the goal and leads to 2nd plot point
- Generally pages 30-90

3) Act Three

- The end of the story
- Includes climax and resolution
- Generally pages 90-120

ONE PAGE = ONE MINUTE

Act One

Inciting Incident

The trigger that sets your hero on his or her journey toward their ultimate desire.

- The protagonist and the protagonist's mission is introduced.
- The antagonist - or a looming sense of the revelation of the antagonist - is introduced.
- Supporting characters introduced.
- The setting of the story world (location, time, tone) is introduced.

Act Two

First Major Plot Point

The protagonist reaches their first major dilemma, which shifts the story in a new direction.

- The conflict needs to increase as your protagonist pursues their goal and works toward proving your moral truth. (Give your protagonist at least 5 revelations.)
- The antagonist needs to gradually gain the upperhand.
- Your protagonist's change is forced through gradual, escalating conflict. This also forces new perspectives on the "want".

Act Three

Second Major Plot Point

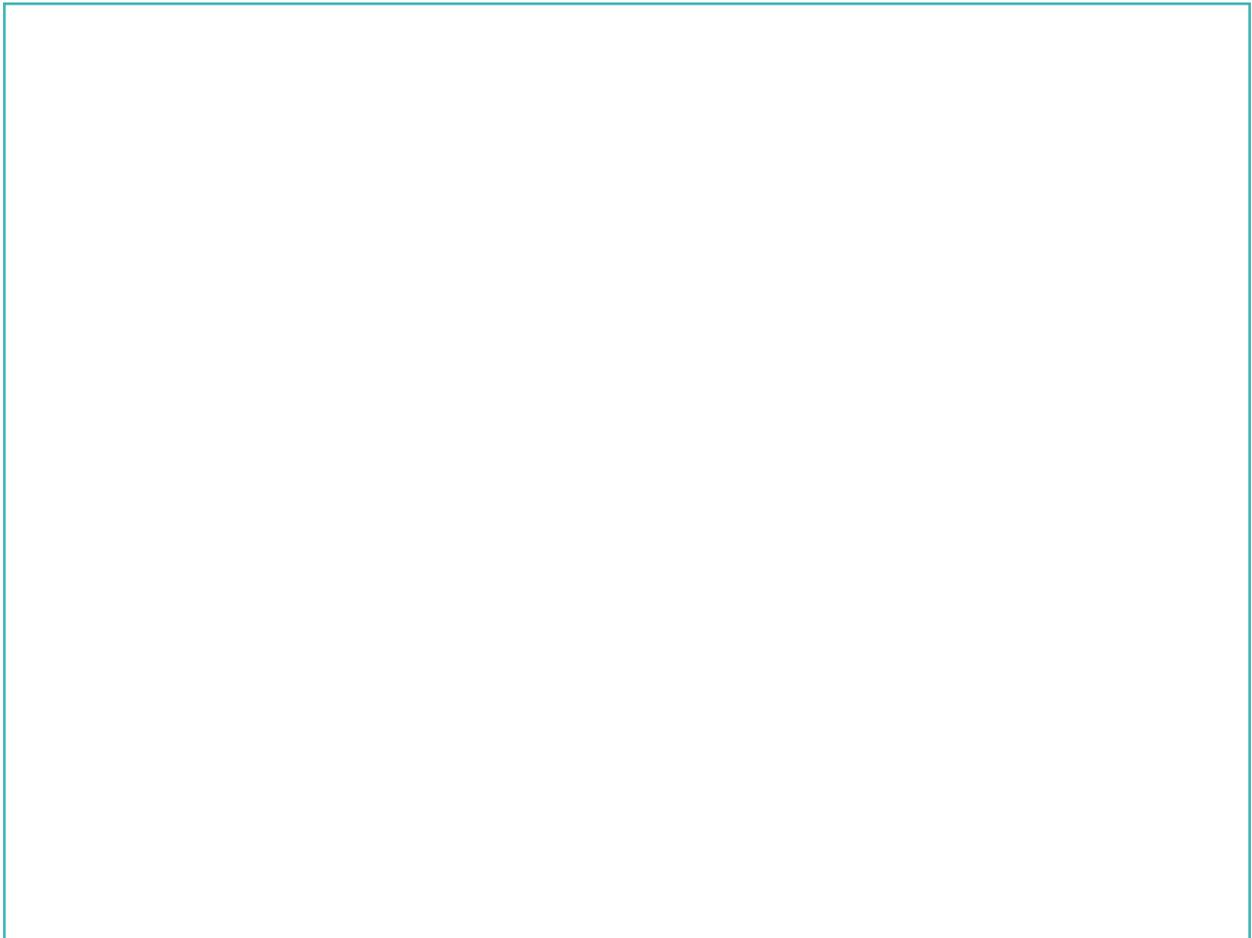
- Bring your story to its natural end.
 - Prove your moral truth.
 - Complete your character arcs
 - Establish a new status quo.
-
- Point-of-no-return
 - Moral choice
 - Climax (final battle)
 - Resolution

MAKE THE FIRST TEN PAGES COUNT

CONTROL YOUR REVELATIONS

KNOW YOUR ENDING

Write your synopsis:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin teal border, intended for writing a synopsis. The box is positioned below the text 'Write your synopsis:' and occupies the lower half of the page.



Writing your Screenplay Outline

Outline

is a scene by scene breakdown of your story.

Every scene move protagonist closer or further from the ultimate goal and reveal new information.

Scene

Beginning: set the stage for conflict

Middle: move the character toward or away from their goal

End: transitions to what will come next

As you begin your outline:

- Gradually reveal information to the audience.
- Your protagonist must pursue one desire throughout the story, but views on that desire must alter as the revelations progress, and it shifts from a want to a need
- Antagonist must make your protagonist's journey progressively more difficult.
- Your supporting characters must be linked to your protagonist's pursuit in a way that is impossible to escape.
- Don't forget what you are aiming to prove and what your protagonist will ultimately learn
- Your protagonist and antagonist must always have something at stake in their pursuit.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Protagonist walks into the bedroom with a box of donuts. They sit on the bed and begin eating every single one.

EXT. PARK - DAY

The protagonist goes to a park, where they sit on a bench and continue to eat more donuts.

PATIENCE PAYS OFF

Exercise 7

Begin your outline!



Formatting your Screenplay

Formatting in Final Draft



Untitled Screenplay

Title Page Scene Heading Elements Insert Image

30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75

INT. BRIAN'S CLASSROOM - DAY → Scene Heading

Brian types into Final Draft to show his students the joys of
formatting screenplays. → Descriptive Action

BRIAN → Character

Hi class! Today we're going to
continue to talk about
screenwriting by utilizing the
functionality of Final Draft! → Dialogue

STUDENT

Is Final Draft easy to use.

BRIAN

Yes.

STUDENT

Fantastic.

Brian and the student high five.

FADE TO: → Transition

EXT. PARK - DAY

After Brian's lesson, he has treated himself to one dozen
donuts which he will eat alone on a park bench.

Formatting in Google Drive Documents



Sample Screenplay ☆ 📁 🔄 Saving... 🗨️ Share

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Add-ons Help Last edit was seconds ago

🔍 A 📄 100% ▾ Normal text ▾ Courier ▾ 12 ▾ **B** *I* U A 🎨 📄 📷 📄 ...

1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

formatting screenplays.

BRIAN
(start your
parenthetical)
Hi class! Today we're going to
Continue to talk about screenwriting
by utilizing the slightly more
arduous functionality of Google Docs.

5-Tabs space

STUDENT
Is Google Docs easy to use?

3-Tabs space

BRIAN
Not as easy as Final Draft, friend.

STUDENT
Oh.

Brian and the student stand awkwardly for a moment before the student walks away from Brian.

FADE TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

Ruler

- Core Qualities
 - Moral Truth
 - Premise
 - Originality
- Characters
 - Protagonist
 - Antagonist
 - Supporting
 - Orchestration
- Plotting
 - Three acts
 - Plot points
 - Revelations
- Scenes
 - Each scene progresses story
 - Has beginning middle and end

Writing dialogues:

- Distill to the essential point your characters are making
- Make every dialogue matter in the story and characters
- Tone
- Practice

- Don't have your characters say explicitly what they want
- Don't have your characters say explicitly what they have learned
- Your protagonist should have more lines than anyone
- Avoid hyper realism
- Have fun with it, change it, alter it, take the time to get it right

Writing descriptive actions:

- Clear
- Concise
- Lets the reader envision the story

- Lets the reader envision the film without effort
- Introduces characters
- Describes setting
- Does not slow down the pace of the read
- Does not give directorial instructions (unless pertinent to the story)
- Reflects the writer's unique vision for the story

Exercise 7

Write your first draft!

Sometimes it helps, after the completion of the first draft, to step away from your project for a bit before reading it.

WRITING IS REWRITING

Screenplay Revisions

Questions to ask:

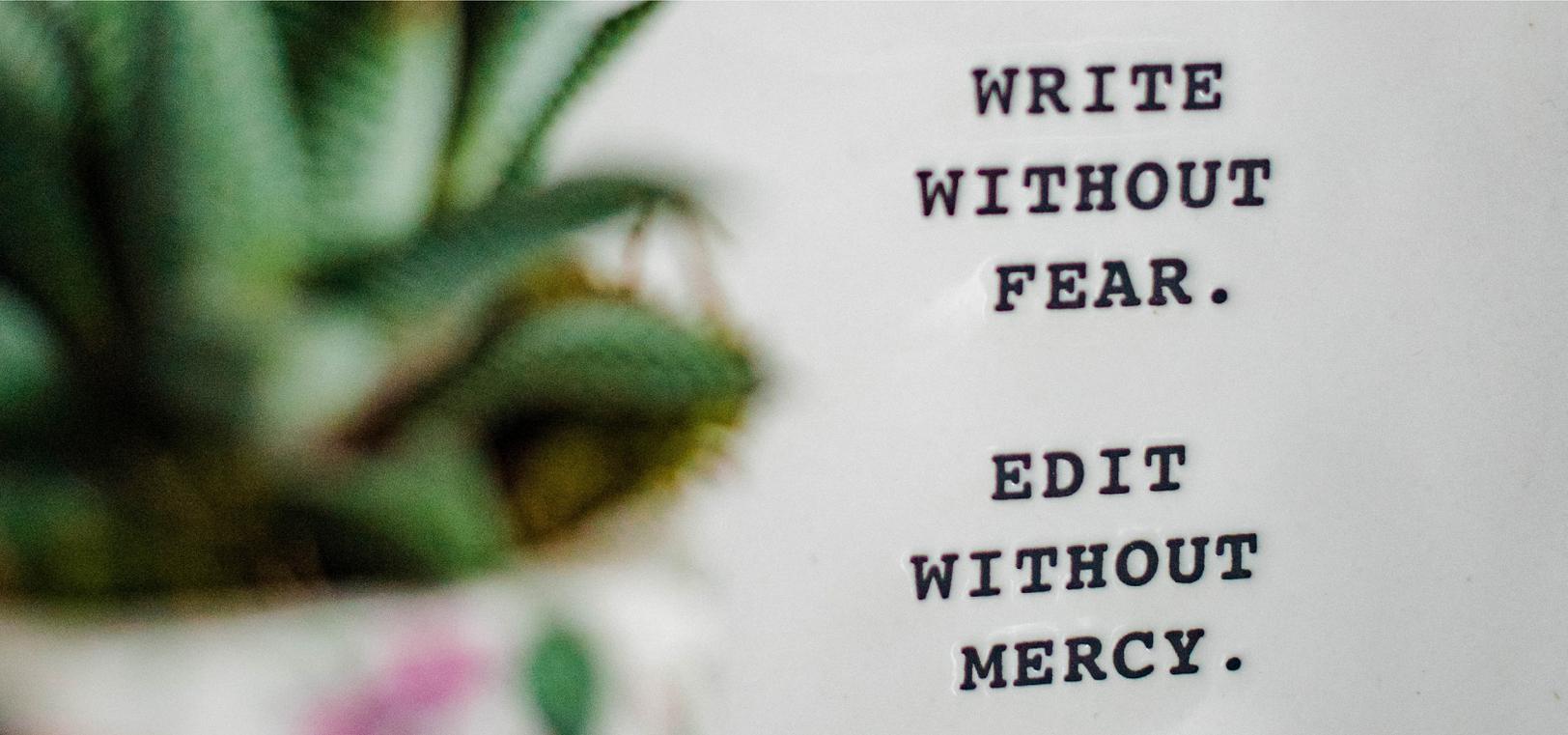
- Where is the story slowing down? Should that be fixed with cuts, or replacement scenes?
- Where is the dialogue telling me what's happening where it could be showing?
- Can any of this dialogue be cut or altered to better serve the story?
- Are there any revelations that do not build, and therefore make the story feel like it's hitting the same beat over and over?
- Is the mission too easy for my protagonist?
- Does my protagonist learn what he or she is supposed to learn?
- Do these feel like real, three dimensional characters? If not, then why?
- Are any of these characters more interesting than the protagonist?
- Are my plot points impactful enough?

Is my moral truth proven in the end?

Answer honestly

Don't be afraid to make big changes

Ask for honest feedback



**WRITE
WITHOUT
FEAR.**

**EDIT
WITHOUT
MERCY.**

Feature Film Story Breakdown

Final Exercise:

Fundamentals

Moral Truth:

Premise:

What makes it original:

Protagonist

Why is Fox the best character to prove the moral truth?

What does he want?

What does he need?

What is his central flaw?

What is at stake?

Antagonist

Who is the antagonist / antagonists?

How do they put pressure on Fox's goal? (Attack, exploit)

Supporting Characters

Who are the primary supporting characters?

How are they linked to Fox's mission?

Act One

Inciting Incident:

First plot point:

Act Two

Revelation 1:

Revelation 2:

Revelation 3:

Revelation 4:

Revelation 5:

Revelation 6:

Revelation 7 / Second Plot Point

Act Three

Point of no return:

Moral choice:

Climax:

Resolution:

How was the moral truth proved by Fox's Story?

Conclusion

Networking

- Friends, family, colleagues

Competitions

- Nicholl's Fellowship
- Austin Film Festival
- Launch Pad
- Screencraft
- Slamdance

Query Letters

- Write to agents or managers who represent like-minded clients

Produce your project yourself

- If you have the means and the drive, go for it!

ALWAYS PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

- Keep writing
- Write stories that matter to you
- Take your time
- Accept rejection
- Keep watching movies and reading stories
- It won't always be easy

thank you!

please, leave us feedback

we hope the course and this guide has helped
you to learn screenwriting fundamentals

check out our profile to see other courses

