



Questions to help focus your Script

CHARACTER

- Who is the main character in your script?
- What does this character want in the script?
- Do they get what they want?
- Does this character change from the beginning to the end of the script? How?
- What are your characters *not saying* in your scenes? Do they have a *hidden agenda*?

STORY (“drama is conflict”)

- What do the other characters want in the script?
- How is what they want in conflict with what the main character wants?
- Who wins — the main character or the other character(s)?
- Do the other characters change in some way from the beginning of the script to the end? How?
- Is there anything your supporting character or characters are *not saying*? Do *they* have a hidden agenda? (People rarely say *exactly* what they mean.)

THEME

- What is your script *about*?
- What point (argument) are you trying to make in your script? (Examples: “All men are pigs.” “There’s more to life than money.” “It doesn’t matter what other people think of you as long as you’re being true to yourself.”)
- Which character embodies this argument?
- Is there another character who opposes this argument, *just as strongly*?

THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR (The Seven Deadly Boring Sins of Screenwriting)

1. Chit Chat — you know, the “Hi, howya doin’? I’m fine.” stuff. While maybe realistic, we’ll all heard these things a million times. It’s boring. Get to the meat of the scene ASAP. The audience will fill in the gaps. Same goes for good-byes. Leave the scene as soon as your point is made.

2. No Conflict — everybody’s good friends and they all love each other. The scene is one great big “love in.” Maybe a nice idea, but not very interesting. Throw your characters a curve ball (or two). Make some waves.
3. Yelling is automatically drama — not! Just because you’re characters are angry and yelling at each other doesn’t automatically make the scene “dramatic.” There has to be something at stake — something big, something important to your main character, something everyone can relate to and understand — *something an audience will buy into*.
4. The characters are all the same at the end of the script as they were at the beginning. Nothing has changed, which leaves an audience scratching their heads, going “So what?” “What was the point of that?” Ask yourself, “What will the audience know at the end of the script (and individual scenes) that they didn’t know at the beginning?”
5. All the characters talk and act the same. Give your characters separate and distinct personalities. Look around at people you know. What makes them different from one another? Try to make your characters at least as different and interesting.
6. Keep the action in the present. Avoid having everyone sitting around talking about what happened yesterday — or explaining what they’re doing now and why. This is called exposition. It’s usually boring. It’s also unrealistic. The characters probably already know most everything about each other’s past. And we can see what they’re doing. Why would they talk about it?
7. “But that’s the way it really happened!” Maybe, but that doesn’t mean it’s automatically dramatic — or believable. Truth is often stranger than fiction. Maybe it really happened that way, but if there’s no conflict or if it *doesn’t make logical sense to the average person*, nobody’s going to believe it. If the audience doesn’t believe the characters in your script and what they do and say, you’ve lost them. They won’t care anymore — except maybe to make fun of it.

ONE LAST PIECE OF ADVICE

Take a look at movies that you like that are similar in theme and style to your script. Observe carefully how the dialogue was written, what the character relationships are and why you like the movie. What was it that grabbed you and made you laugh, cry or get angry?

You don’t want to outright copy another movie, of course, but watching them can give you clues as to how to make your scene come alive.

You can also learn a lot from bad movies, movies that totally didn’t work for you. Why didn’t it work? What was it that made it stupid or unbelievable or boring? Avoid making those same mistakes in your script.