

LOGLINE

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Letter from the Editor

The 2010 PAGE Awards Winners have been announced! These fortunate few should enjoy greater credibility in queries, interest from representation, and good old-fashioned Hollywood "buzz" for their winning scripts. Congratulations to everyone who won a prize and thank you to all who competed. And remember, our 2011 contest is just around the corner! We'll begin accepting submissions in December.

As we bring down the curtain on another year of *LOGLINE*, we're pleased to present a special preview of the PAGE Awards eBook [The Insiders' Guide to Screenwriting: How Hollywood Evaluates Your Screenplay](#). Next, 2009 Bronze Prize Winner James Loos extols the benefits of writing with a partner. PAGE Awards Judge Daniel Manus helps you make the leap from Semi-Finalist to Winner. Dave Trottier, the Wizard of Format, shows you how to make adjectives disappear. Producer Marvin V. Acuna provides the third pillar of success for screen scribes. As always, InkTip closes the show with hot leads from the spec scene.

Happy reading,



Insiders' Guide Sneak Preview: Premise/Concept

by Collin Chang

Back in my misspent college days, I went to one of those big frat house shindigs branded a failure if the cops didn't show. I'd just met a sweet sophomore named Ariel when our heads bongo'ed as we both reached for the last remaining Guinness in the fridge. A real life "Meet Cute." In the middle of a remark about two heads trumping a single noggin, I suddenly felt a lick of electric tension. It was almost as if someone swept a live wire just above the hairs on the back of my neck.

I'd felt that only once before in my life, when I was six years old and sitting in the passenger seat of my dad's Mercury Cougar. A big semi truck sideswiped us on the freeway. A split second before the truck slammed into us, sending our tiny car spinning into the guardrail, I felt that same electric sensation.

Every head in the kitchen swiveled toward the living room. All breathing stopped and we became a party of mannequins. Through the sea of heads and shoulders I couldn't see what was happening, but I heard a girl scream. The sound sliced through the din of collegiate revelry like a fire engine's wail. An instant later Ariel voiced the obvious, instinctive, perfect question: "What's happening?"

She didn't ask "Who's involved?" or "What's the deeper meaning of it all?" The immediate, natural human reaction to such a mysterious, tense and electrifying event is to simply ask, "What's happening?"

This is also the fundamental question at the core of every screenplay. The chaotic party scenario (and my childhood car accident, for that matter) mirrors the movie-going audience's experience of a good story. The setup is surprising, impossible to ignore, and fraught with unanswered questions. We don't know what's happening, but we know we need to find out.

If the setup for your story replicates this kind of experience, you will hook your audience. "What happens?" is the most important question you need to ask yourself as you begin writing your script. It's also the question that representatives and producers first ask when they consider your work. The answer to that question is, fundamentally, your script's concept. What's the difference between "concept" and "premise"?

The **concept** is the engine of your story and the **premise** is that idea developed into a **logline** – that short, one-or-two sentence ditty that tells industry execs what your movie is about. Recognize these loglines?

An over-the-hill boxer gets one last chance at glory when he's handpicked for a publicity stunt match with the reigning world champion.

When terrorists overrun an office tower Christmas party, a lone police detective trapped inside is the only hope for the survival of the hostages – among them, his estranged wife.

Both premises kind of seize you by the jugular, don't they? These loglines describing *Rocky* and *Die Hard* share one commonality with that fateful night in the frat house: Something's happening, and I for one want to know how it plays out...

Want to read the rest? Order our new [Insiders' Guide to Screenwriting](#) today!

One is the Loneliest Number

by James Loos

Most of us who write don't have issues filling an empty page. We relish the opportunity to blister a blank screen with action, slugs, and killer lines of dialogue. We can dominate the white space. Smack it down. Make it our bitch. The hard part?

When we get notes back.

This is when we're stuck trying to defend what we've written, rewrite what doesn't make sense to others, and try like hell not to screw up the good parts. It's when we're alone that the voices of doubt in our head screw everything up.

James Loos and Steve Schoen live in Portland, Oregon. They won the 2009 PAGE Bronze Prize for Drama with their script *Missing* (formerly titled *Dazzle Land*) and as a result have been picked up by Samurai MK Management. *Missing* has a director circling, with an eye on going into production in the New Year.

For roughly 10 years, I wrote alone. It was grueling work filled with indecision, doubt and many times, utter despair. I'd receive soul-crushing notes that left me confused and depressed. I began to think about giving up the wild goose chase called screenwriting.

In desperation, I turned to Steve Schoen, a newly retired former professor of mine with more than 30 years of teaching creative writing under his belt. He suggested that we write something together.

I now had a wolf pack of two. And I've never looked back. Here's why...

The pros of writing with someone:

- You split contest entry fees
- Every rewrite goes through two sets of eyes
- New ideas must please both writers, not just one
- When you win a contest, you get to celebrate with someone who understands what went into the process
- When you lose a contest, you have someone to commiserate with
- Rewriting is done with someone who cares as much about making the script better as you do
- In a pitch room, you've got backup in case you stammer, stutter or drop the ball

The cons of writing with someone:

- You share the money and accolades
- You have to pitch your new idea and hope your partner likes it and wants to spend six months hashing it out
- You have a responsibility to someone else to do your best work (this is arguably a pro as well)

The most important ingredient when you write with another person is the element of trust. Like any marriage or union, you have to have each other's backs. When you hand in a scene, it is critical that your partner honors what you've written by improving it or coming up with something better. And vice versa, of course.

It is just as important when entering a room that you give each

other space to show your talents. For me, I'm conversational and tend to connect with people when I've got time to shoot the breeze. Steve can pitch anytime, anyplace, with the calm, clear demeanor of someone who spent a lifetime teaching.

When it comes to writing, I'm the steam engine. I'm the puppy that wiggles and squirms to get out on the walk. Steve is the tinkerer. He takes his time, hones each phrase, and sharpens the script to an almost lethal edge. Together, we balance. We move. We are a force.

"The most important ingredient when you write with another person is the element of trust."

If you can find that one person who shares your vision and has equally important yet different gifts, try writing with someone for a change. The combination of your talents might make the difference between getting a pass and getting noticed.

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The Difference Between Semi-Finalists and Winners

by Daniel Manus

Are you a perennial Semi-Finalist, but have yet to land in the winner's circle of the PAGE Awards or any of the other major screenwriting contests? Much like when you submit your script to producers and agents, being **good** isn't good enough. Especially when a screenwriting contest receives thousands of entries. To win, your script needs to be **great**.

As an in-demand script consultant and founder of No BullScript Consulting (www.nobullscript.net), Daniel Manus was ranked one of the Top 15 "Cream of the Crop" Script Consultants by *Creative Screenwriting Magazine*. He has worked as a Development Executive for Clifford Werber Productions, Eclectic Pictures and Sandstorm Films. He is also a columnist for *The Business of Show Institute* and teaches seminars to writers all across the country.

After judging the thriller/horror category of this year's PAGE Awards, it became clear to me the number of differences between the scripts that are good enough to make it to the Semi-Finals and the scripts that are **great** enough to win. In fact, I've come up with 10 of them. Here they are, in no particular order:

1. Winning scripts have an original voice that just jumps off the page. So often there are two scripts with similar stories or plots or characters, and the better script is always the one with an original and distinct voice that makes a reader feel the writer's personality on the

page. It's not just in the dialogue, but in the descriptions of your characters and scenes, your transitions, your formatting, etc. Your voice is the thing that makes your writing stand out. And in screenwriting competitions – where it's about finding that great new voice – this is critical.

2. In winning scripts, the stakes are high enough, relatable enough and interesting enough **from the very beginning**. If there are no dramatic stakes built into the story starting from page 1, that means it's going to take a while to get into the story. And if the stakes aren't relatable or I can't connect with them, then inevitably the characters and story are less relatable.

3. Winning scripts have a story that is not only original, but also compelling and easily visualized. There were a few zombie/werewolf/creature type scripts in this year's Semi-Finals – and Lord knows they've been done many times before – but when they were done in an interesting and original way, with a new angle or twist, that's what mattered. As I evaluate a script, I ask myself: Is this a story that deserves to be told on the big screen? Even if it's a small story that has two characters and takes place in one room, is what's going on visual and compelling enough that I'd pay to see it?

4. Winning scripts have likable, relatable characters, with interesting motivations that explain what they are doing and why. And those motivations are explained well enough without being incredibly on the nose. If the characters' actions are unmotivated or we don't understand why they do what they do, their emotional turns will seem unearned and unconvincing. That makes it difficult for readers to connect with your characters.

5. In winning scripts, the antagonists are just as fleshed out and interesting as the protagonists. A crazy killer isn't interesting unless there's a **reason** he's a crazy killer. Even horror staples Jason, Freddy and Michael Myers all had really engaging backstories that inspired their insanity. How interesting would Clarice Starling be if Hannibal Lecter didn't exist? If your bad guy is just angry, he's not a very interesting character – and

therefore, your major conflict is not interesting. Your antagonist should have a motivation that is as relatable (or at least as understandable) as your protagonist's.

6. Consistency in tone was a huge factor in my decision process, as well. If a writer sets up a great tone on page 1, it immediately creates this world that sucks you in. One issue with a few of the scripts I judged was that a dark horror tone was set up on page 1, but on page 60 it suddenly shifted into a funnier, satirical horror mode (ala *Snakes on a Plane* or *Piranha 3-D*). When a script has a major tonal shift, an executive won't know how to sell it.

7. Connected to that, winning scripts always follow the natural direction of the story. Forcing a story in an uncomfortable direction can cause your plot or characters to fall apart. And you can always tell when that happens. It's like the character on the page looks up at you and says "Huh? I'm supposed to do **what** now?" If your story has a comedic concept, did you force it into being a thriller, or vice versa? If so, there's going to be a disconnect and your story will suffer.

8. The best screenwriters know how to self-edit and are careful with their words. Every word in a winning script is deliberate. If any piece of dialogue or description doesn't progress your story or tell us something important, reveal something, enlighten or entertain us, it's probably fluff that can be deleted.

9. Winning scripts are fast, easy reads. Judges have to read anywhere from 20 to 200 scripts in a limited amount of time, so you can understand why the scripts that are easy to read get better scores. If a script is dense, long (these days, 120 pages is on the long side), has huge passages of description, etc., that's probably the script the Judge puts off to read until last.

Personally, I know a script is great when it only takes me about an hour to read it. I know a script is weak when it takes me multiple attempts to get through it. Before you submit your script, give it to a few people who have experience reading screenplays (not just friends and family) and ask them to time how long it takes them to read it. Yes, everyone has different reading speeds, but if **everyone** says it took them three hours, then you'll know something is awry.

10. Winning scripts feel polished and professional. Having a great original idea and a basic knowledge of screenwriting principles may get you to the Quarter- or Semi-Finals (depending on the contest), but the scripts that win contests are almost never a writer's first screenplay. And they sure as hell aren't the first draft.

At the end of the day, when judging a contest, I ask myself the same question I ask when working as an executive or a consultant: Is this screenplay good enough that I would give it to my boss with my recommendation? If not, then it doesn't deserve to win.

I hope these thoughts and ideas have been helpful for you. Good luck in next year's contest!

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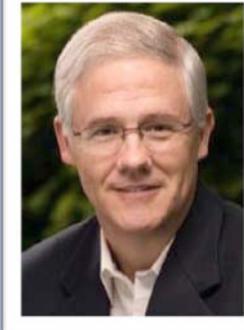
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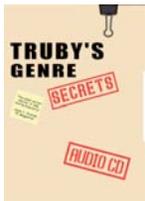
Secrets of Genre: Part 1

by John Truby



John Truby is regarded as the serious writer's story coach and has taught his 22-Step Great Screenwriting and Genre courses to sold-out audiences in Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Sydney, Rome, Toronto and other far-flung locales. Over the past 20 years, more than 30,000 students have taken Truby's 22-Step class and rave about the insights and direction it has given them. He is also the author of [The Anatomy of Story](#). *Booklist* declares, "Truby's tome is invaluable to any writer looking to put an idea to paper." To learn more about John Truby's classes, screenwriting software, and story consultation services, please visit www.truby.com today.

John Truby's "Genre Secrets" Audio Workshop Series



From the writers, directors and producers of *Shrek* to *Sleepless in Seattle* to *Star Wars*, Truby's screenwriting courses have trained some of the top players in Hollywood today. They will teach you hundreds of **genre-specific techniques** so you can compete with the best.

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What's my genre? That's the single biggest question you should ask yourself when that great premise idea first pops into your head. Why? Because of the **First Rule of Hollywood**. Most writers work at a tremendous disadvantage because they don't know this rule, which has to do with what producers and studios want to buy.

Hollywood doesn't buy and sell movie stars, directors or writers. The First Rule of Hollywood is that **Hollywood buys and sells genres**.

If you're not selling them what they want, you're out of luck.

"Genres" are different kinds of stories, like Action, Detective, Love and Thriller. They are the all-stars of the story world that have been popular with audiences for decades and sometimes centuries. That's why Hollywood buys and sells them, and why you need to know not only which genres you're using in your script, but also how to write them well. Many writers wrongly believe that they are competing against the 100,000 scripts written every year. In fact, they are competing against the other scripts in their genre. Which is why you have to know your genre cold.

Mastering your genre seems like it should be easy, since these are forms we have all seen at the movies since we were kids. Unfortunately, each genre is a complex story system where all the crucial elements exist under the surface in the structure. Each genre has a unique hero, desire line and opponent, asks a key question, uses a specialized storytelling strategy, and expresses a highly detailed set of themes. Most importantly, each genre has anywhere from 8 to 15 unique story beats that must be in your script or your script will fail. And you have to twist each story beat, writing each in an original way so your script stands above all the others in your form.

But here's the good news: all the techniques required for a great genre script are very precise and can be learned. There's no reason you can't become a master of your form and write a script that presents your genre to the Hollywood buyers in a fresh new way.

I'd like to give you a brief look at some of the most popular genres in the entertainment business. They make up about 99% of Hollywood films and television. Of course this won't begin to cover all the techniques you need to master your form. I teach an all-day class in each genre, and even that doesn't cover everything. But this will give you a sense of which form you're probably working in.

Perhaps the most popular family of genres in film and television is Detective, Crime and Thriller. But you have to be careful when choosing one of these forms. While they all involve a crime, they are very different forms with very different structures.

Detective stories (*L.A. Confidential*, *Chinatown*) are about searching for the truth, so you need lots of suspects who could believably have committed the crime. This form also has more reveals than any other, and many writers have trouble sequencing these reveals, since they normally occur in reverse chronological order. Detective is the genre most popular on TV.

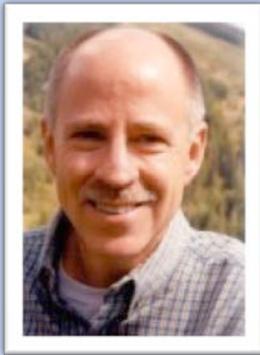
Crime (*The Usual Suspects*, *No Country for Old Men*) is a genre that places less emphasis on detecting the criminal and more on the cat-and-mouse beats of catching him. This pushes Crime toward the Action genre, and means the opponent is best when he is some form of master criminal.

Thriller (*Michael Clayton*, *The Sixth Sense*, *The Silence of the Lambs*) is the most popular of this family of genres in the feature film world. Like Detective stories, Thrillers involve detection but there are typically far fewer suspects, and emphasis shifts to the detective being an average person who enters extreme danger. Thrillers are surprisingly tough to structure because you have to coordinate two opposing desire lines: the hero wants to uncover the killer while also escaping intense attack.

Writers of the **Love** story, and particularly Romantic Comedies, are always surprised, and a little chagrined, when I tell them that they have chosen probably the most difficult genre to write well. There are many reasons for this, among them the fact that Love stories (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*) are highly choreographed, with no less than 12 unique story beats. But the biggest reason they are so tricky is that the hero's desire and opponent are the same person. No other genre has this peculiar structural element. The hero wants the lover, but the lover is also the first and main opponent. The result is often a writer who doesn't know if the story is coming (attraction) or going (repulsion). The good news is that the Love story, when written in an original way, is extremely popular with audiences worldwide.

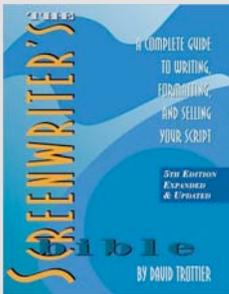
Genres are a big mystery to most writers, but you can use them as a secret weapon to stand above the crowd.

Next issue: More genres dissected, including Action, Horror, Comedy and Science Fiction.



Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant, he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. [The Screenwriter's Bible](#), Dave's primer for both aspiring and professional scribes, is perhaps the most comprehensive industry guide on the market. To learn more about Dave Trottier's books, classes and mentoring services, visit: www.keepwriting.com

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Adjectives, Verbs and Wisdom

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

You often talk about using specific verbs to describe actions without adverbs, and using specific nouns without using adjectives. Are you saying that adjectives and adverbs should be avoided whenever possible?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

No, I'm saying that you won't need to use as many adjectives and adverbs if you use specific, concrete nouns and verbs.

For example, here's a sentence containing an adverb and a couple of adjectives: *He is walking slowly to the big, yellow boat.* Now, here is the same sentence, using a concrete verb and a concrete noun: *He staggers to the yacht.* Because I use concrete, specific language, I do not need the adverb and adjective, at least in this particular case. And notice how the specific verb "staggers" characterizes my character. Finally, do you see that the active verb "staggers" is stronger than the passive form "is staggering?" Specific language can help you bring characters and action to life.

Even when you use concrete nouns and verbs, you still may see a need for concrete adjectives and adverbs.

In the following sentence, I use a couple of adjectives for visual clarification: *He stumbles to the red brick bungalow.* Thus, my real point is this: Use concrete, visual language in your narrative description. Adjectives and adverbs are helping words. First make sure your verbs and nouns are strong and then look for helping words if you need them.

As the late, great Paddy Chayefsky (*Marty*, *Network*) once said...

"I have two rules. First, cut out all the wisdom; then, cut out all the adjectives."

I don't think he meant he actually went through the script and omitted every adjective; I believe he is referring to lean, concrete and specific language. The "cutting out all the wisdom" alludes to the tendency of some writers to sound preachy, or overstate their theme, or write pretentious, unnatural dialogue.

Keep writing!

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The Three Pillars of a Successful Screenwriting Business: Part 2

by Marvin V. Acuna

In this two-part article, industry insider Marvin Acuna answers the question, "What is the key difference between a successful screenwriter and a screenwriter who is not successful?" Marvin's opinion: Successful writers recognize that their art is also a business.

(For Part 1, download our September-October issue [here](#).)

Gerard J. Arpey, president and CEO of American Airlines, said the best business advice he ever got was, "Borrow money when you can, not when you need to."

This is sound advice that can be translated and applied to...

Pillar #3: Networking

I find most aspiring screenwriters believe that there is only one specific time and place for networking and that's when they see "an easel sitting at the entrance of some ballroom with a sign that says so."

Bestselling author and syndicated columnist Harvey Mackay said, "If I had to name the single characteristic shared by all the truly successful people I've ever met over a lifetime, I'd say it is the ability to create and nurture a network of contacts."

Personal networking is instrumental to your career. It's an invaluable tool to identifying rare opportunities suited to you, as well as to maximize the value of your current relationships.

But networking only when you need to is foolish and sets the wrong tone. Relationships take time, building rapport requires patience, and entertainment professionals are naturally cautious – if not fearful – of those who are simply taking, rather than giving.

It's pretty easy to spot those who are just networking purely to take... not to give. Therefore, begin networking before you need anything from anyone.

To start with, you must understand all your strengths and weaknesses. Then, seek opportunities where your abilities contribute value to others.

Others will want to be a part of your network if they know that you will add value. And more importantly, your existing relationships will be strengthened if you can consistently add value to those in your network.

Your mission: be the first person everyone remembers and suggests when others ask, "Do you know anyone who..."

Start now, and become a trusted node and connector, not a fragmented meteor that is only visible as it enters the atmosphere.

Consider this: Networking is all about mutual benefit...

So why not give first?

In summary, I feel it's important for you to understand that talent is only one part of the equation. If you are a hobbyist, then this may not ring true to you. That's okay. You aren't looking to make a living off your hobby. I get it!

But, if as you are reading this you are committed to working as an entertainment professional, then I leave you with this...

"Business art is the step that comes after art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called "art" or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I want to be an art businessman or business artist."

– Andy Warhol



Marvin V. Acuna is the co-creator and executive producer of *Hitmakers*, a new elimination competition series for Bravo that showcases undiscovered singers and songwriters as they battle through a series of songwriting challenges. He executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (John Malkovich, Tom Hanks, and Colin Hanks) and *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue), among other films.

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1. Go to <http://www.inktippro.com/leads/>
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3. Copy/paste the corresponding code

New Symphony Pictures

[code: jgtdv4zwyj]

We are looking for completed one-hour drama pilot scripts featuring a male lead role. However, the show should appeal to both men and women. Please include info on the main character. Each episode should tell a complete story ("stand alone").

Budget has not been determined. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

Our credits include *Home of the Giants* (Haley Joel Osment, Danielle Panabaker).

Please submit your work only if it fits the above description exactly. If you aren't sure, email jerrol@inktip.com. Thanks!

Dan Films Ltd.

[code: rk069h7p6s]

We are looking for completed feature-length vampire scripts for teen/young adult audiences. In other words, a film for the *Twilight* age group. The story can be set internationally.

Budget will not exceed \$8 million. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

Our credits include *Triangle* and *Severance*.

Please submit your work only if it fits the above description exactly. If you aren't sure, email jerrol@inktip.com. Thanks!

Nasser Entertainment Group

[code: tb7866v991]

We are looking for completed feature-length action comedy scripts, i.e. something in the vein of *Rush Hour* or *Men in Black*.

Budget won't exceed \$5 million. WGA and non-WGA writers OK.

Our credits include, among many others, *Christmas Crash* and *Desperate Hours: An Amber Alert*, both of which were written by writers discovered through InkTip.

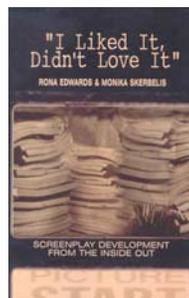
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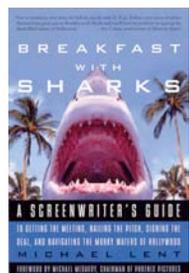
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