

LOGLINE

The Screenwriter's eZine

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In this issue:

[Latest News from
the PAGE Awards](#) 1

[The Writer's Perspective
How to Make Your
Mark at Film Fests](#) 2
Erin Donovan

[The Judge's P.O.V.
Structure and
"The 11th Idea"](#) 3
Sheri Sussman

[What's Your Genre?
Writing the All-Star
Story: *The Avengers*](#) 4
John Truby

[Spec Writing Tips
Sing for Your Supper](#) 5
Dave Trottier

[Industry Insider
Three Steps to a
Killer Query Letter](#) 6
Marvin V. Acuna

[Sell Your Script
Hot Leads
from InkTip](#) 7

[Recommended
Resources](#) 8

Letter from the Editor

The competition is closed at the 2012 PAGE Awards and Judges are now turning in the scores that will determine this year's Quarter-Finalists. The list will be posted July 15 – will you be on it? Time will tell! Looking at this year's field of entries, we've noticed a number of new contestants who are also first-time subscribers to this publication. Welcome, new readers! **LOGLINE** is published six times a year, free of charge, to help the ever-growing PAGE community increase their odds of achieving screenwriting success. This eZine is a clearinghouse for information about industry trends, the changing needs of the marketplace and, most of all, practical insights into the art and craft of effective cinematic storytelling.

The weather outside is hot and so is the content in this summer issue. We begin with 2010 Bronze Prize winner Erin Donovan, who weighs the pros and cons of taking a script or a short to film festivals. PAGE Awards Judge Sheri Sussman preaches the power of structure and offers a clever tip for settling on the best story ideas. John Truby, acknowledged expert in the arena of genre films, examines what made the script for *The Avengers* critical to its massive success.

Tackling thorny format questions is what Dave Trottier does, so the question of how to handle song lyrics in dialogue presents no challenge for him. Prolific producer Marvin V. Acuna offers invaluable advice on what to put in your query to representatives (and what not to!). Every issue ends with the latest hot leads from InkTip.com, where production companies post information about the types of scripts they're currently seeking.

Happy reading,



Latest News from the PAGE Awards

- ◇ The new thriller *Murder on the 13th Floor*, by 2011 Bronze Prize winner Steve Peterson, premiered on May 19th on Lifetime. Producer Douglas Shaffer met Steve via our co-sponsor [InkTip](#) in October 2011 and hired him to write the movie. Shot in California two months later, the film stars Tessa Thompson, Sean Patrick Thomas and Jordan Ladd. Steve is represented by The Gersh Agency.
- ◇ Duncan Cook's 2011 Bronze Prize-winning animated Family Film *Somewhere South* was optioned by Cobblestone Films and producers Ben and Jacqui Adler.
- ◇ The 2010 Gold Prize-winning feature *Maggie*, by John Scott III, is now in pre-production. The horror/drama will be directed by Henry Hobson, produced by Pierre-Ange Pogam, Matthew Baer and Trevor Kaufman, and financed by Inferno Entertainment. *Variety* reports that Chloe Moretz and Paddy Considine are in negotiations to star. John was signed by CAA shortly after his PAGE win.
- ◇ 2011 Bronze Prize winner *The Tenth Commandment* (now titled *Smoke & Mirrors*), by U.K. writer Christian Ryden, is in development with Atlas Entertainment and producer Rick Suckle. Chris writes: "This all started with you guys. It was your **amazing** promotion of my script that brought it to Atlas' attention. **Huge** thanks to PAGE for everything – the opportunity from the contest coverage was remarkable. I've learned so much through this development process and I can't tell you how glad I am that I entered last year." Chris was also just signed by Europe's biggest agency, Independent Talent.

The [2012 PAGE Awards](#) Quarter-Finalists Announced July 15, 2012!

How to Make Your Mark at Film Fests

by Erin Donovan

I love a good Pros and Cons list. They work particularly well for writers, individuals who have probably already refined their abilities to procrastinate well beyond the average Joe's. For this most excellent time-waster, a Pros and Cons list is guaranteed to take procrastination

Erin Donovan won the 2010 PAGE Bronze Prize for her comedy/thriller *Ding Dong Ditch*, which is now in pre-production with Scallie Filmworks. Erin's new short film *Mindfield* was directed by Nina Corrado, starring Leslie Hope and Grant Show. *Mindfield* recently won the award for Best Short Film Script at the Madrid International Film Festival.

to a new level. With the simple task of making two lists (the "yea" and the "nay"), all the muscles of real writing get flexed:

- spit-balling
- focus
- a gathering of perspectives
- organization of ideas
- decision-making

That's all very creative, right? But above all, you are writing — you're writing a Pros and Cons list, for Pete's sake! Yes, I consider the Pros and Cons list an essential tool for any serious lazy-bones.

With that in mind, I'd like to discuss the Pros and Cons of taking a feature screenplay to festivals versus making a short film to take to festivals.

Screenplay: The Pros

Hoping to hit a festival with a screenplay? That is, if they even have that category? Writing a screenplay is less expensive than making a short. All that writing costs is... well, not going to lie, it does eat into your procrastination time.

Screenplay: The Cons

A writer friend once said that the very hardest part of writing is getting someone to read it. Well, I suppose someone had to read your screenplay by the time you're invited to one of these do's, but the truth is even if you pitch the hell out of it, the *jeuge* just ain't the same. Oh, you're there, it's an honor, it's great and a huge networking opportunity and blah, blah, blah... but you're still the ugly cousin, no question.

Short Film: The Cons

Let's start with the Cons here because that list is pretty miniscule. I mean, making your own Short Film isn't even **that** expensive anymore, so there's one excuse gone. Yeah, I've got nothing.

Short Film: The Pros

For one thing, a short screenplay can be popped out in a **fraction** of the time it takes to write a full-length feature, so the instant gratification factor has to count on the Pro side. Plus, making a Short is just so much damn **fun**. The latest short film I wrote is called *Mindfield* and it's currently making the rounds on the festival circuit. I wrote it for a friend, Nina Corrado,

who was applying to the AFI's directing program for women. When Nina didn't get into the program, we decided there was nothing stopping us from making the film ourselves.

Okay, there was probably plenty to stop us. It can be a big learning curve, making a small movie. But we were young! (I actually don't have that excuse. We did it anyway.)

The process starts with casting. I don't know how others feel about casting, but for me, coming up with cast suggestions for something I've written is like settling in with a chocolate chip cookie, popcorn, and ice cream to watch my all-time favorite movie. Can't beat that.

And Nina was fearless about contacting people. **Fearless!** We ended up with an amazing cast — fantasy-come-true, that kind of thing. Moral to this part of the story: Actors **want** to work. If you can get past the gatekeepers (and you can), you'll find actors waiting eagerly. They want good parts. Give them that and you're more than halfway there.

Next, it was all about pulling in favors to put together the crew. Not as daunting as it sounds. It's not just actors who want to work. Lots of people have their own pet projects on the boil, and the "favor exchange" works both ways. I now owe-owe-owe a ton of people. And when they decide to call in that debt, I will gladly do my part: haul lights, dress sets, arrange craft services, whatever's needed. It's a fair exchange. Like I said before, just the physical act of making the movie was so much fun.

Another point for the Pros side is seeing your writing produced. I'm not just talking about hearing actors bring your words to life... but now that I mention it, you're **hearing actors bring your words to life!** Then there's the whole sociability of the process, the camaraderie, the *joie!* After the isolating process of getting the script down on paper, this sudden explosion of people on a set, all focused on this little idea you had — I was completely blindsided. In a good way.

Now, if you want to go ahead and direct your short film yourself, good for you. Me, I happen to be of the opinion that the collaborative process between a writer and director can reap better results than a one-man band. Plus, if you don't direct the movie yourself, all you really have to do is wash your hair and show up on time! It's the same fun. More, maybe. So there's that.

Conclusion: Make Your Own Short Film

I've been to several festivals with screenplays I've written, but this was my first time out with a short film. I'm no expert but for me, short wins hands down. Making your short film gets you a screening time, with the possibility that someone (someone **important**) will see it. So far, we've only been to two festivals with *Mindfield*, but we were asked to do a Q&A at one and won awards at the other. It felt like being at the big-kids table.

So, if at all possible, make your short film yourself! After weighing the Pros and Cons, those are my words of advice from the first rung on the ladder.

Structure and “The 11th Idea”

by Sheri Sussman

I am a true believer that with anything you do in life, you must master the craft if you want to be great at it. While writers are not doctors, teachers, engineers, or scientists curing cancer, we do have the power to affect people's lives. Great films throughout the years have made a powerful impact on people and the decisions they've made, altering the course of their future.

Sheri Sussman was one of the writers of the critically acclaimed Sundance feature *MacArthur Park*. She has also written and produced several award-winning short films and documentaries, including *Kismet*, *Call Back*, *Life in a Basket* and *The Second Opinion*. This is Sheri's first year as a Judge for the PAGE Awards.

Structure Is a Template

If you want to be a professional screenwriter, you must take the time to learn how to structure your script. Even if you're just taking a shot at writing a screenplay because you have one story you are compelled to tell, the

structure of your screenplay is what will make your script a movie.

Structure is a template. Once structure is in place, you are free to create and let loose! You can then have fun writing scenes, characters, and dialogue because the structure has told you what has to happen, why, and where.

A beautifully structured script is like listening to a symphony that takes you to another place and allows you to fully engage in the story and characters. There are no “speed bumps” for the reader. There is nothing stopping the reader or making us feel that something is wrong or doesn't make sense. No beat begs the question “where did that come from?” A well-structured script has the best chance of being optioned or bought, rewarding you for the endless hours, days, months or even years you spent creating it.

The best part is that learning structure will guarantee that your script will be better. When structural staples such as inciting incidents, turning points, climaxes and resolutions are all correctly used, your story will benefit tremendously.

Form is Not Formula

Structure should not be confused with what makes films “formulaic” or “commercial.” I often hear writers say “I want to think outside the box” or “I don't want to make a formulaic, commercial movie.” I always answer, “To break structure, you have to know it!” Even *Pulp Fiction* is a perfectly structured film. Just because a story is told out of sequence does not necessarily mean it is formless and un-structured. In fact, the multi-plot, non-linear “structure” Tarantino used is superbly conformed to turning points and perfectly intertwining subplots. Tarantino is a cinephile who deeply understands the craft of filmmaking.

Whenever you receive seemingly “nitpicky” comments about your work, it almost always has to do with

something structural. Most naturally talented writers have a fundamental understanding of story, dialogue, and characters. But if you can't seem to get your script to where you want it to be, it is almost always a question of structure. The good news is that structure can easily be learned and taught. It is much harder to “teach” someone what makes a good story or character.

“When structural staples such as inciting incidents, turning points, climaxes and resolutions are all correctly used, your story will benefit tremendously.”

There are many ways to learn structure. Read the Robert McKee book *Story* or any of Syd Field's books. You can even take a shooting script of a great movie that you like and watch the film over and over while referring to the script. Break down the acts and the escalating conflict between the protagonist and antagonist. Study how the writer intertwined the subplots leading to the climax of the main plot.

Once you become proficient at structuring a screenplay, you will never get comments tearing apart your script anymore. Then it just becomes a question of whether the reader likes your story or not.

“The 11th Idea”

Of course, structure is only the foundation of your script. On top of that foundation, it's critical that your story and plot feel fresh and original, not like dozens of other scripts we've already read. So how do you find that original twist that will differentiate your screenplay from all the others on the market?

“Push yourself to the 11th idea” is a concept I learned in a writing class. This exercise drives you to come up with structure-serving scenes that are almost always better than your first thought.

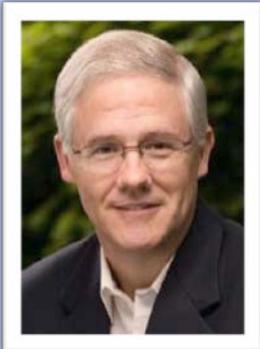
When developing a scene, your first five ideas are probably ones you've seen before. With the second five ideas, you'll often try to do something that is the opposite of the first five. Those ideas are rarely true to the organic nature of your story and characters. The 11th idea is most often the original idea that fits the best.

For example, let's imagine a scene where two lovers share the famed “meet cute.” It's been done thousands of times, but the 11th idea for how they meet – one we've never seen before – can be pure **gold**. Readers will automatically be drawn in by your original idea and appreciate your achievement.

The stories for movies always change and evolve, but the structure and craft of a screenplay will remain the vital foundation. Learning your craft is a gift to yourself as a writer. I guarantee that it makes writing a screenplay easier and frees you up creatively to be more “anti-formula.” You can utilize your voice as a writer to its fullest potential, creating a completely unique and original screenplay.

Writing the All-Star Story: *The Avengers*

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.

The Avengers is why Disney bought Marvel and paid them so much money. It's all about the character bank. In a worldwide market, companies put a premium on branding, which is selling an already recognizable product, and transmedia, which is telling the same story through many media forms. If you own a large bank of appealing, recognizable and repeatable characters, you rule the storytelling world.

Marvel has made a number of hugely popular films focusing on a single superhero, like *Thor*, *Spider-Man* and *Iron Man*. But *The Avengers* takes this genre to a whole new level, because it's all about the lure of the all-stars, the Dream Team.

The all-star story is as old as myth itself. The Greek gods on Mt. Olympus and the Norse gods in Asgard are each communities of the best in their field. In more recent story forms like the caper film (*Ocean's Eleven*) and the suicide mission story (*The Dirty Dozen*), the pleasure comes from watching a bunch of highly talented individuals come together as a team to accomplish an apparently impossible goal.

Just because these are superheroes or gods doesn't mean you don't have to establish a strong weakness-need for them at the beginning of the story. One of the strengths of the Marvel characters has always been that they run counter to the old conventional wisdom that superheroes are all good. In a great story, regardless of genre, the plot always plays out the character's internal flaw.

Marvel characters have loads of flaws. For example, the Hulk has a real problem with rage, Thor is arrogant, and Iron Man's Tony Stark is a raving narcissist. All well and good. But with all-star stories you face an additional challenge in this area. You have to establish the weakness-need for a lot of major characters, and you have to do so in a relatively short period of time, without delaying the plot.

Whedon's smart solution to this character challenge is to use two story techniques at once. The first technique, which Whedon brought over from his experience as a television writer, is to generate the primary conflict among the heroes. In the middle of the film, the heroes have gathered together but are not yet a team. Some of the Avengers imprison the main opponent, Loki, in their huge mothership. Loki doesn't seem to put up much of a fuss about this, and that's because he is planning to defeat the Avengers by getting them to fight amongst themselves.

And how do our heroes fight each other? They attack each other's ghost and weakness, ultimately destroying their own ship in the process. So we get a plot beat – attack by the opponent – along with a quick character sketch of each hero's flaw. It's interesting to the audience because it's expressed through conflict, not as boring exposition.

Notice that the dissension also sets up the basic character change in the story, which is from troubled individuals to a perfect team. That moment of character change, when the heroes form a ring to fight as one against the alien forces, is the sweetest emotional moment of the film.

Here's another tough story challenge. If you are going to have a team of all-star heroes, you have to come up with an equally strong opposition to match them. Again Whedon's solution is instructive. The Dream Team element meant he wouldn't try to come up with a single opponent, like The Joker, who would attack the heroes morally, questioning the very concept of the savior, or superhero. But he also didn't go for the single opponent who would try to match the heroes' physical abilities. Other than his apparent imperviousness to pain, Loki has no special superpower. Instead, he is the master schemer, a god whose distinguishing quality is his brain. He is potentially stronger than all the all-stars combined, because he can outsmart them. He can use his knowledge of the special weakness of each superhero to defeat the entire team.

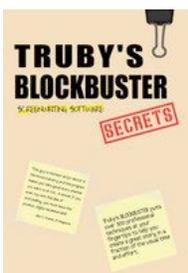
The Avengers is an action-myth story, so we need a big physical battle. To take on the opponent's role of physical action and fighting, Whedon brings in alien forces that not only have super powers, but attack by the thousands. Loki and the aliens form a nice combination of brains and brawn that can seriously challenge the Dream Team.

The Avengers shows us once again that the all-star story is one of the most popular in storytelling history. But it's harder than it looks. If you remember to start by identifying the form's unique story challenges, you will be halfway home.

John Truby's

"Blockbuster 6.0"

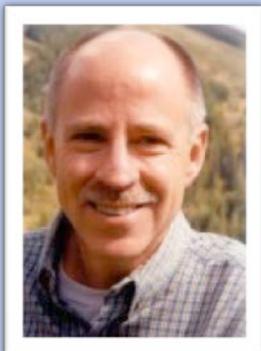
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Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant, he has helped dozens of clients sell 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

Sing for Your Supper

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

I am currently polishing a script that includes old song lyrics and improvisational rap in the dialogue. Parenthetical direction (i.e., rapping, singing) will probably work in most cases, but seems overused because of the volume of lyrical dialogue. I am considering four formatting options: 1) italicizing the lyrics, 2) underscoring, 3) using poetry-style layout (as opposed to wraparound text), and 4) slash marks (/) to convey lyrical rhythm. I can't seem to find a formatting rule to cover this. Help!

DAVE'S ANSWER:

The reason you cannot find a formatting rule is because you are not supposed to include songs in a spec script, except on rare occasions. It's generally best not to quote at length from songs you don't own the rights to. Doing so could create a possible legal roadblock to selling your script because the producer must obtain the rights to use the songs. Brief quotes are perfectly okay, however.

If the song is in the public domain, then you may use the lyrics. However, resist the temptation to use a song in a script unless the song has a powerful story purpose. Don't do it unless you're sure it will help your script and won't create an unnecessary negative reaction.

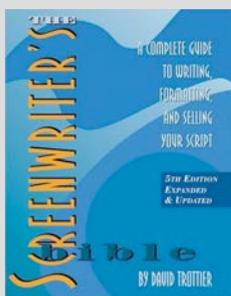
If the songs (or "improvisational rap") are original to you, including them in your script still adds an obstacle to the selling process. It means that the producer must not only love your script, but the music/lyrics you wrote for it as well. Though maybe he or she will.

If you must include song lyrics, use the parentheticals you mention, and place the lyrics in stanza format (option 3 in your question) or use front-slash marks (option 4) to separate the lines. The following is a poem by Ogden Nash:

OG
(rapping)
I don't think I'll ever
see/ A billboard lovely
as a tree/ Indeed, the
tree I'll not see at all/
If the billboard doesn't
fall.

A spec script should focus primarily on a great story. Tell a great story, and you'll be singing all the way to the bank.

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Three Steps to a Killer Query Letter

by Marvin V. Acuna

Here are three basic guidelines to consider when crafting your next query letter:

1. Know Your Market

Targeting CAA or any of the top-tier literary representatives is simply the wrong strategy. They are shaping careers, not inventing them. Targeting boutique entities that develop new talent is a more appropriate and useful strategy. New blood is welcomed. But be original.

Most representatives' inboxes are littered with emails that begin:

Dear Representative,

I'm in search of a manager to help me sell my work.

Boring and generic, right? If your email query begins this way or anything that resembles it, you may as well delete the email yourself.

Instead, use the power of the Internet to ensure that your introduction stands out. Do some due diligence on the target. This affords you the opportunity to personalize the letter. This is a town full of press releases, screenwriting forums and companies that exist to track who is being hired, fired and promoted, as well as who sells what, who buys what, etc. Use this information to set yourself apart.

Here's an example:

Dear Chris,

Congrats on the recent spec sales to Sony Animation and Disney, especially in the current environment. I found the Sony project's logline particularly fun and entertaining.

That opening presents you as an informed professional rather than a novice.

2. The Right Hook

The industry is changing and will continue to evolve. What will not change is this: Representatives are seeking material they can sell in a competitive marketplace!

Your logline is the essential ingredient. I recommend that you always introduce your most commercial, biggest idea. Your logline should evoke the imagination to see the movie poster. If it doesn't, rework your one-to-two-sentence logline until it does. The goal is to entice the reader to request the script, just as a trailer's purpose is to sell tickets. This is the "coming attractions" moment.

Christopher Vogler (author of [The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Screenwriters](#)) and I spoke at length about this. He offered the following technique when crafting a logline. Think in terms of a certain rhetorical device – "Not only, but also." In essence, you are introducing the reader to a base they are already familiar with, but then offering a twist or something about the subject they did not know. For example:

The Easter Bunny decides to retire and hides out as a pet with a suburban family, turning their lives upside down.

By distilling your screenplay idea to its most memorable form, you will make it easily transferable and saleable.

3. The First Impression

Never neglect the basics of spelling, grammar, and clear, vivid writing. This is your first impression, and it matters! Your query letter itself is a writing sample.

This is your sales tool, not a sales pitch. Don't make the mistake of confusing the two. This is not the place to ramble on about how great your screenplay is or how engaging your characters are. That's for the reader to decide. (**Special Note:** If your uncle tells you that your premise is a \$100 million-dollar idea, let him buy it. Don't tell the rep you are querying.)

Write a professional, intelligent, concise, intriguing query that includes a compelling and commercially viable logline and not only will you entice representatives to ask for more, but you'll be one step closer to a sale.



Marvin V. Acuna is an accomplished film and television producer. He is currently in post-production on the features *Chez Upshaw*, starring Kevin Pollak and Illeana Douglas, and *Lovelace*, with Amanda Seyfried, Peter Saarsgard and James Franco.

Previously, he executive produced *The Great Buck Howard* (starring John Malkovich) and *Two Days* (Paul Rudd, Donal Logue), among other films.

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Sell Your Script

Hot Leads from InkTip.com

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER!

Please submit your work only if it seems like a **perfect fit** for these companies' needs. If you aren't sure your script meets their criteria, please check with jerrol@inktip.com before submitting it. **Do not contact the production company directly.** Thanks!

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR SCRIPT:

1. Go to <http://www.inktippro.com/leads/>
2. Enter your email address
3. Copy/paste the corresponding code

Sarke

[code: wns8xez9pf]

We are looking for situational horror, thriller, or suspense scripts. Stories must be about character(s) in a situation where they have a very clear and specific goal and a reason why they cannot reach that goal. Please describe your story's character/goal/obstacle situation in the synopsis, since this is the basis on which we evaluate material submitted. For example, in *Open Water 2*, they want to get back into the boat but can't because they forgot to lower the ladder. In *Dead on Arrival*, he wants to find out who poisoned him but only has three days till he dies. Your pitches/treatments should be registered before you pitch them.

Budget will not exceed \$1 million. WGA and non-WGA okay.

Our credits include *247°*, written by a writer we met on InkTip.

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: 434h0fh9v7]

We are looking for completed feature-length period action, i.e. scripts in the vein of *Conan the Barbarian*. Submissions should have limited locations and/or a majority of locations outdoors that do not require set building.

Budget will not exceed \$3 million. Non-WGA writers only, please.

Our credits include the upcoming *Final Girl*, among others.

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

Vuguru

[code: 8f9jgwrvm]

We are looking for completed feature-length limited-location action/thriller scripts (less than six locations), in the vein of *Phone Booth* and *Buried*. This is a low budget project so no expensive car chase sequences, extensive VFX, large crowd scenes, etc. We are open to both male and female leads. Definitely NO horror.

Budget will be around \$500k. WGA and non-WGA okay.

Our credits include *The Booth at the End*.

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

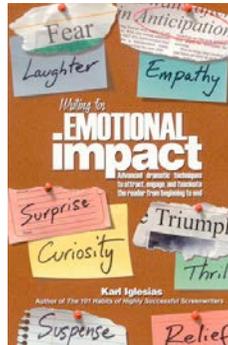


WRITING FOR EMOTIONAL IMPACT

There are three kinds of feelings when reading a story – boredom, interest, and WOW! To create that WOW! feeling on as many pages as possible, you must engage a reader emotionally.

This book goes beyond the basics and argues that Hollywood is in the emotion-delivery business, selling emotional experiences packaged in movies and TV shows. Learn hundreds of dramatic techniques to take your writing to the professional level.

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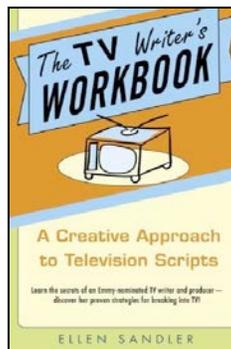


THE TV WRITER'S WORKBOOK

In this unique hands-on guide, television writer and producer Ellen Sandler shares the trade secrets she learned while writing for hit shows like *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *Coach*. She offers concrete advice on everything from finding a story to getting hired on a current series.

Filled with easy-to-implement exercises and practical wisdom, the book outlines the steps for becoming a TV writer, starting with a winning script. Sandler explains the differences between "selling" and "telling," form and formula, and theme and plot.

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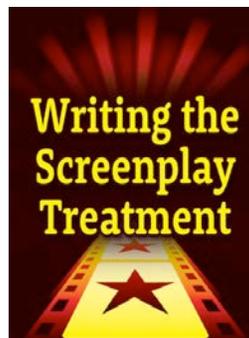


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