

LOGLINE

The Screenwriter's eZine

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Letter from the Editor

I'm excited to announce the launch of [eMeetings: Writers & Reps](#), a landmark initiative in the history of the PAGE Awards. Screenwriters join the Production Arts Group, our new online community, to gain exclusive access to participating industry professionals. Our first series features three dynamic managers whom I've had the pleasure of interviewing for our group. They bring to our program a wealth of experience and knowledge of the marketplace. Even better, these three reps are here to scout new talent and, hopefully, sign some writers! I have a feeling they will...

In this autumn edition of **LOGLINE**, we have our own strong roster of talented contributors who have stepped up to share their insights into the art and commerce of screenwriting. In this issue, 2010 Gold Prize Winner John Scott returns to talk about the all-important followup project to one's breakthrough script and relay lessons learned from his go at it. PAGE Awards Judge Mike Kuciak wraps up his discussion of script notes and how to handle them like a seasoned pro. The master of genres, John Truby, offers up the principles used to pen the most successful movies of all time. And your trusted source for technical know-how, Dr. Format Dave Trottier, walks you through the process of writing dialogue for characters who stutter or speak in a regional dialect.

Providing that finishing kick is producer Marvin V. Acuna, who poses key questions aspiring writers should ask themselves before embarking on this journey in a serious way. And don't forget to take a look at the latest leads from InkTip. One of these three production companies may be looking for a script like yours!

Happy reading,



Latest News from the PAGE Awards

- ◇ The 2010 Silver Prize-winning historical film *Three Lines in History* is in the early stages of pre-production, with Armand Assante attached to star. Screenwriter Mark Eaton reports, "We are filming in Romania, and we've pieced together a great team to get the project done. It's good to be moving forward." [View the teaser here.](#)
- ◇ Ray Liotta stars in the 2010 Bronze Prize-winning thriller *Bad Karma*, by Steve Allrich. Produced by Zero Gravity Productions and directed by Suri Krishnamma, the movie was recently filmed in Australia and is now in post-production.
- ◇ Beverley Gordon (BrownBag Pictures) and Diana Lesmez (StoryMaker Entertainment) optioned the 2010 Bronze Prize winning script *Scout* from writer Laurie Weltz. Weltz will direct the film and India Ennenga (*The Women, Treme*) is set to star.
- ◇ The new sitcom *Spy*, created by 2008 Gold Prize winner Simeon Goulden and produced by Hat Trick Productions, is scheduled to air on Sky1 HD TV this fall. Jimmy Mulville, executive producer at Hat Trick, says "The writing, the characters and the situations in *Spy* mark it as one of the funniest and strangest takes on the family comedy. Dysfunctional doesn't begin to do it justice."

Finalists for the [2011 PAGE Awards](#) will be announced on September 15, 2011!

Choosing an Assignment: The Next Round in the Chamber

by John Scott III

When I wrote my article for the last issue of *LOGLINE*, I'd just flown to Los Angeles for my third round of meetings and finally decided which production company I trusted to bring my little zombie drama, *Maggie*, to the screen. It was a long and sometimes confusing

In 2010, John Scott III won the Gold Prize in the Thriller/Horror category and also entered a script that reached the Final Round in the PAGE Awards' Science Fiction category. A graduate of SIU Film School, John currently lives in Boston, where he works for NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory. He is now represented by Creative Artists Agency (CAA).

process. Each company brought something unique to the table, and most told me exactly what I wanted to hear. But in the end, for a variety of reasons, I chose to go with a European production company.

Phew... Decision made. I'd just nailed a bull's eye with that round, but my agents had already loaded the next round and kicked out a clay pigeon. I discovered very quickly that screen-writing isn't only about

what's on the table now; what's next is equally key.

Via the power of CAA, I was put in rooms with some of the industry's most influential people, including the producers of some of my favorite movies. Given the timeline of my young career, it was a truly surreal experience. And more often than not in these meetings I found my agents' advice surfacing and these words leaving my mouth: "Thank you, but I don't think that's right for me."

What?!? What did I just say? Who am I? Little ol' me, turning down **Hollywood assignments?! That's what I got into this business to do, right?** What I worked so hard for, what I entered so many contests for, and now I'm saying "no"?

Initially, I thought I should be snatching up these opportunities. But, every single time, I forced myself to remember what my agents told me the day I met them: "When it comes to what's next, figure out what you love and choose what you can nail."

What did they mean, "figure out what you love?" I love everything. Hell, my two favorite films are *Amelie* and *Jaws*. And I love most everything in between. Were they talking genres? Certain adaptations?

After a plethora of meetings regarding comic-book adaptations, it clicked. Now, I love comic books. I read them every day growing up and I enjoy a great comic-to-film adaptation. But I found myself wanting more character. I began shying away from action and story-centric comics that didn't provide, for me at least, the character development I really wanted to explore.

So there it was – one piece of the puzzle. At this point in my career, I desire character development. I then gravitated to producers pushing novel adaptations. I'll fully admit that when I was young, I hated reading.

I was a movie guy. Throughout high school, I think I single-handedly drove Cliff's Notes stock through the roof. It was only after I got my first job as a satellite operator and enjoyed audio books on those long drives to remote Air Force bases that I seriously fell in love with literature.

Producers asked me to read book after book. Some were good and some were... well, let's just say I politely said no. But then, I found it. The one book that had it all. A great story, great character development, and I saw it as a film. I mean, I **saw** it.

I ran back to my agents like a kid from a toy store asking for money to buy that coveted Red Ryder BB gun. And they told me I'd shoot my eye out. This adaptation had been attempted many times by well-respected names, and previous screenwriters can have the contractual right to be credited for the final film – whether you used their "take" or not. Essentially, it's not **yours**, and benefits decrease.

So, mantra adjusted: "Figure out what you love and choose what you can nail.... And it's a good idea to get something to call your own."

I was a little disappointed, but it happens. I took more meetings and read more novels, comics, short stories. On my last trip to L.A., my agents got me a meeting with the president of production at Warner Bros. that was **awesome**. He told me how much he enjoyed *Maggie*, offered me a few opportunities, and asked me something that I'm rarely asked: "What do **you** want to do?"

In the chaotic amazingness of assignment bombarding, I'd lost what it was I really **wanted** to do. I forgot which stories I really enjoyed. What would I love to adapt? As I thought about it, a vague memory rattled around in my head... some novel... one I knew would be visually fantastic.

As often happens, I remembered at 2 a.m., right before falling asleep. It was a fairly obscure four-part Sci-Fi series I had read years ago. The next day, I emailed the idea to the exec that the WB prez set me up with. He had coverage done on the series and loved it. I was stoked, but cautious.

Now comes the second part of the mantra: "...and choose what you can nail." I've read the series twice and know it pretty damn well, but at a whopping 960 pages for the first book alone, this would be a daunting mission.

Then, luckily, I met with another producer while waiting for the rights to solidify. She had pitched the same series! We were both in awe that the other even knew about the books. So I called up the WB exec and asked if we could work with this producer and her company. WB agreed and we were off to the races.

As I write this, I'm sitting at Logan Airport in Boston, awaiting a flight to L.A. to work on an outline. It's been an odd and dizzying journey, and I have a lot of people to thank for it, PAGE included. But my agents provided the key advice that helped me wade through the wave of potential assignments and ultimately prevail.

Remember – it's your career. Do what you love. And nail it.

Learning to Love Script Notes: Part 2

by Mike Kuciak

In Part 1, Mike discussed the collaborative process of script notes, explaining they are not so much criticism as an earnest effort by representatives and/or producers to advance your script down the path to production.

Mike Kuciak served for seven years as Senior Vice President of Development for a management/production company, where he found, developed and set up projects at Fox 2000 and Universal. In 2009, Mike founded the management and production company Samurai MK, through which he's now producing a slate of comedies and thrillers.

Last time, we talked about **why** you might get notes on your script. Now let's get into **what** to do with them.

What is the expected turnaround on notes?

If it's a huge, page-one rewrite, no one will look askance if the job takes you three months or so, though it's a good idea to keep people updated on your progress. Since a page-one is in some ways a "first draft" of a completely new take on an idea, it tends to track the same rules and rhythms of a first

draft. On the other hand, if it's a job that most people would consider to be a "normal" rewrite (it doesn't involve a change of core elements) or a polish draft, taking three months is likely to be seen as a lack of interest on your part. It doesn't bode well.

Sometimes a set of notes is challenging and takes longer than normal to crack. The best way to handle this (as with many things in the industry) is to maintain an open line of communication with the team. If enough time has gone by that people have started wondering, "Where's the script?" it's better that they know you're fully engaged and working hard, compared to knowing nothing.

This is another situation in which a conversation with your rep is the best bet. A manager or agent won't balk at an email that simply asks, "What's the best turnaround?"

Rushing through the notes without really thinking them through doesn't do anyone any good. It suggests that you don't care how the script turns out. Similarly, taking a million years on the rewrite, only to turn in a draft that addresses the notes – but in the most bare-minimum manner possible – is, again, indicative of a lack of engagement in the project.

To put it in perspective, if your movie makes it to production, do you want the director, actors and crew to ignore your input? Do you want them to do the absolute least they can get away with? Or would you prefer they give it their all to make a great movie?

What if the notes don't click?

Sometimes notes seem doable when you have your meeting, telcon, etc., but once the hood is popped on the script and you're up to your elbows in narrative grease, it's apparent that they create more problems than they solve, or shift the script in a direction that doesn't match the vision of the project. ("Wait, if we make Bob a vampire, how can he be winning surfing contests?")

First, see if you can make the notes work anyway. In every aspect of the industry, challenges aren't problems – they're opportunities to show how driven, smart, hard working and awesome you are. If you can crack the note in a smart way despite any problems it may present, then you're a rock star.

If it's still not working, then we're again looking at communication. That said, writers love to write and a writer hitting a block will often respond by sending everyone on the team a 10-page email describing in infinite, loving detail why rewriting a screenplay is hard. It's better to start with a short – short – email to your rep, which he or she can forward to the team.

With complex problems, it isn't untoward to ask to get people on the phone to discuss. Again, the goal is to get a good script, which will in turn hopefully lead to a good movie. Most people would prefer that you make your thoughts known and get input rather than stumble through an unsuccessful rewrite, which only lengthens the development process.

However, your **first** response shouldn't be a call. For a creative professional, the first step is trying to solve the challenges on the page yourself. While being open and collaborative enough to throw questions to the team, you've always got to keep your big-kid pants on. When it comes to the script, everyone should be bringing their questions to **you**.

Consider: your motorcycle is making a weird noise. You bring it to a mechanic. He runs the bike, hears the noise, looks at you and asks, "Wow, what is that?" Not inspiring, is it? The script is the bike. **You** are the mechanic.

There are situations in which contributing rewrites before you're paid makes sense.

This especially applies at an independent level, which often involves a ton of work going into a project before a cent is seen by anyone. Independent projects rarely have a development fund backing them, as studio films often do. Financing is generally contingent on a viable package (script, director, bankable talent) being in place.

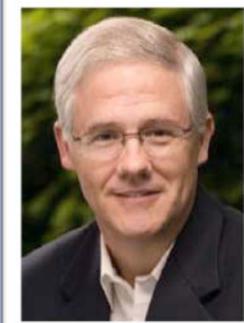
While the package is coming together (a process that can, and often does, take years), your manager or agent isn't paid until money comes in. Producers aren't paid and, if they optioned the script, they're taking a financial risk. Thus, if it seems unfair that you're not getting paid to rewrite the script... well, consider that no one else is getting paid for any of the work they're putting in, either. It's akin to a group of people launching a company. The IPO might turn everyone into millionaires, but until that day, everyone on the team is eating ramen, working, dreaming and putting in sweat equity.

This is the reality of the film industry.

Movies are nothing but dreams that can be shared with humanity. The effort to get a film made – and the refinement of that dream as you address script notes – is the job of transforming something that is shared and ephemeral into something that is shared and real.

Five Keys to Writing Blockbusters: 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.

It used to be that summer was the season for blockbuster movies. Now it's a year-round phenomenon. Hollywood is in the business of selling films to a worldwide audience, which means they are always looking for a script with blockbuster potential.

Most screenwriters think a blockbuster is simply a film that does really well at the box office. Technically speaking, that's true. But the reality is that a script with blockbuster potential is a very special kind of script, with a number of story elements that studio executives are looking for.

I'd like to point out five of the most important blockbuster script elements, out of about 40 that we consistently see in the top moneymaking films.

Technique 1: The Myth Genre

The first blockbuster story element has to do with the genre you use to tell your story. When Hollywood was selling primarily to an American audience, most executives thought that movie stars were the key to a hit film. But in the last 10 to 15 years, the vast majority of blockbuster films have had no movie stars.

Instead the emphasis has changed to genre films with great stories. For a film to reach a worldwide audience, it must be popular in over 100 different cultures and nationalities. Story forms are instantly recognizable anywhere in the world.

But you can't just choose any genre if you want to write a script with blockbuster potential. Most writers don't know that some genres travel well while others don't. For example, comedies based mostly on funny dialogue don't travel.

Ironically, the story that travels best is the oldest genre of all, the myth form. Myth is found in more blockbusters than any other genre by far. Add up the box office for the following myth-based movies: *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Shrek*, *Star Wars* and *Avatar*.

The reason myth transcends national and cultural boundaries so well is that the form tracks archetypal characters and archetypal life situations. These are fundamental character types that everyone knows, and life experiences everyone passes through from birth to death.

Like any genre, myth has a number of unique story beats you must employ. And remember that in blockbusters, myth is almost always combined with one or two other genres such as action, fantasy and science fiction, which serve to update and unify the myth story for a young audience.

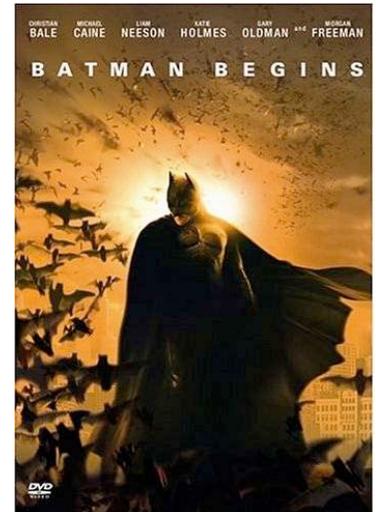
Technique 2: The Hero's Goal

The single most important element in an international blockbuster is narrative drive - the ability of the story to propel itself forward at an increasing rate. Narrative drive comes primarily from the hero's desire line. Desire is one of the seven major story structure steps, and provides you with the all-important spine on which you hang all characters, plot, symbolism, theme and dialogue.

Average writers tend to make at least one of these mistakes when coming up with a desire line: their hero has no clear goal, he/she accomplishes the goal too quickly, or the hero reaches the goal by taking only a few action steps.

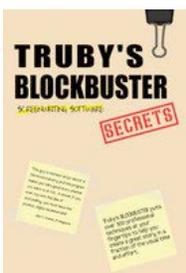
There are three keys to a good desire line. First, make it specific - the more specific the better. Second, extend the goal as close to the end as possible. Third, make sure the hero is obsessed with it. Above all, intensify the desire.

Next issue: John details three more techniques for writing blockbusters.



John Truby's

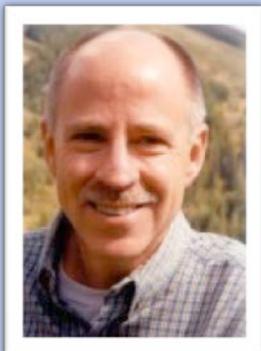
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Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant, he has helped dozens of clients sell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

Stuttering and Dialects

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

I am writing a screenplay where the main character stutters almost all the time. How should I indicate that in the dialogue? I find it annoying to indicate it in parenthesis before every line of dialogue, so I came up with something like the following:

JOHN
W-what? I-I d-don't understand.

Do you have any suggestions?

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Just show a flavor of stuttering; that is, occasional stuttering to remind us that this character stutters. Don't overdo it or, as you rightly said, the reader will be annoyed. Also, when you first introduce the character, indicate in description that he or she stutters.

The same holds true for accents and dialects – just give the reader a flavor. Don't adjust the spelling of every word to show precisely how each and every word would be pronounced in a certain dialect or with a certain accent. That makes the dialogue too difficult to read.

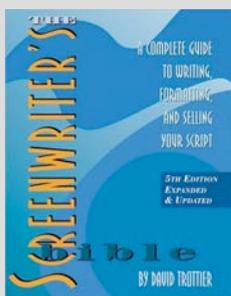
If there is a lot of stuttering that continues throughout the story, consider a note of explanation at the beginning of the script. The following is excerpted from the screenplay for *The King's Speech*.

Bertie is frozen at the microphone. His neck and jaw muscles contract and quiver.

BERTIE
I have received from his Majesty
the K-K-K...

(NOTE: For ease of reading, Bertie's stammer will not be indicated from this point in the script.)

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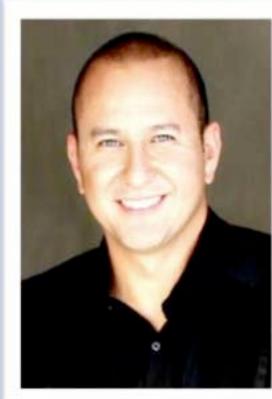
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Is This the Best You Can Do?

by Marvin V. Acuna



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

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It's said that former U.S. Secretary of State and Nobel laureate Henry Kissinger reviewed the work of his new speechwriters in the evening. The next morning, he would gather his staff and utter one simple comment: "Is this the best you can do?" The apologetic staff passionately argued that they could do better. For three consecutive mornings, the question elicited the same response. Finally, on the fourth morning, the staff responded with a resounding "Yes. It is the best we can do!" Mr. Kissinger simply replied, "Good. Now I'll read it."

Before you seek out representation, make sure you are ready! Review the following questions to help you define a clear vision for your career. This is not a test; there is no wrong answer. But please answer truthfully.

Why do you want to be a screenwriter?

Is this **your** dream, or someone else's dream? Is this **still** your dream, or are you pursuing the dream of an old you?

What about screenwriting do you enjoy most?

What is your definition of a successful screenwriter? Be as clear as possible. In essence, how will you know when you are successful? **Be clear.**

Would you enjoy rewriting other people's work?

How will you feel if others rewrite **your** work?

How will you feel if you earn a good living, but your material is never produced?

Most people require stability and job security. Writing is a fulltime freelance career. Are you disciplined enough to manage your own schedule?

How much time are you devoting to writing each week? Treat writing like a part-time job until it becomes a full-time job. Can you commit 20 hours a week?

As a business owner, I'm accountable only to myself. While I am disciplined, ambitious and motivated, that makes it easy to be distracted. The power of accountability to others has helped me move mountains and create the life I now live. Is there someone you trust and respect that will support you and encourage you in tough times? If so, share your goals with them. If not, find someone.

Have you set daily, weekly and yearly writing goals? If not, create them.

Are you clear on your strengths as a writer? How did you develop this strength?

Are you clear on your weakness? What are you doing to improve in this area?

Which screenwriters inspire you? Have you actually **read** their material, or only viewed the finished product?

What type of stories do you want to tell? Why should people care? What are you doing that's different?

How many years are you prepared to devote to this career? Is there an end date?

Which producers do you wish to work with? Directors, actors? Do you know anything about them other than their movies?

Is there a writing group in your town you can join? Considered starting one?

Do you want to adapt novels? Is there a novel that you wish you could adapt now?

What will you buy with your first check from screenwriting?

How will it feel to see your film screened in a theater in your hometown?

How will it feel to win your first big award? What would you say in your acceptance speech?

If you can formulate clear answers to these questions about your career as a screenwriter, the more enjoyable the journey will be.

Clarity is power.

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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!

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[code: sw9f84cn5b]

We are looking for completed feature-length Christmas or Valentine's Day scripts with heartwarming, romantic love stories suitable for television. Material should garner a probable MPAA rating of PG – no foul language, violence, sex, etc. When pitching, please state clearly whether you are pitching a Christmas or Valentine's Day story in the personal message space.

Budget will not exceed \$2 million. WGA or non-WGA writers OK.

Our credits include *Devil's Knot*, which was co-written by a writer we discovered through InkTip.

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

Envision Entertainment

[code: x859duxy83]

We are looking for completed feature-length high concept, limited-location action or sci-fi scripts. By high concept, we mean stories that can be pitched in a sentence or less, and by limited location we mean projects for which equipment must be packed up and moved only once or twice. A house (even one with multiple rooms) is single location, but a city is not.

Budget will not exceed \$1 million. WGA or non-WGA writers OK.

Our feature film credits include *Basic*, *Pathfinder*, *Janie Jones* and the upcoming films *Waco* and *Chained*.

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

Vindicated Pictures

[code: ba72x16c8w]

We are looking for completed feature-length psychological thriller scripts set in less than six locations. We are seeking edgy scripts with strong characters that push the envelope in content or style, with the vibe of such examples as *Memento*, *Sexy Beast* or the television series *Breaking Bad*. We are not open to scripts with serial killers, slasher films, torture or gore.

Budget will not exceed \$500,000. WGA or non-WGA writers OK.

Our credits include *Forget Me Not* (2011), with Bella Thorne.

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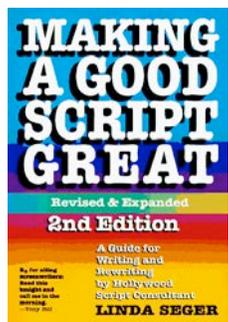


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Author Marilyn Horowitz, an award-winning New York University professor, is also a writing coach whose students have written bestselling novels as well as successful features and TV series.

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