

LOGLINE

The Screenwriter's eZine

HOLLYWOOD

January/February 2009

Volume 2: Number 1

Published by:

The PAGE International
Screenwriting Awards
7510 Sunset Blvd. #610
Hollywood, CA 90046
www.pageawards.com

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Letter from the Editor

The 2009 PAGE Awards season is now underway! Writers around the world are being proactive about their careers by entering screenplays in competition. Whether following through on New Year's resolutions or continuing a journey begun years ago, hundreds of aspiring screenwriters have decided their work is ready to be judged. Time will tell who will prevail, but we thank you all for taking this courageous step toward seeing your stories told onscreen.

Speaking of time, our early entry deadline is January 15th – so make sure you submit your script by midnight on the 15th to take advantage of our Early Entry Discount rates!

In this issue of *LOGLINE*, I review the fundamentals of a professional logline. Our 2004 Gold Prize Winner, Alan Woodruff shares lessons learned by producing and directing his winning short-film script himself. PAGE Awards judge Lauren Waldron discusses the subtleties of subtext. John Truby analyzes *Slumdog Millionaire* and the confluence of myth and love stories. Dave Trottier teaches us how to successfully "direct on the page." And in InkTip's Hot Leads column, you'll find notices from producers who are currently looking for new screenplays. Finally, in Jennifer Berg's column, you'll learn the first steps necessary to make your own movie.

Happy reading,

John Evans

Logline 101

by John Evans

Many aspiring screenwriters are unclear about the difference between a logline, a synopsis and a tagline. A tagline is a catchy slogan for the movie but says little about the storyline – for example, the famous tagline for *Jaws 2* is "Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water...." The tagline is normally used in marketing campaigns for a produced film, not a spec script. As for the synopsis, this is a summary of the script's plot that usually runs 1-2 pages in length. It's often useful for writers to do a synopsis for their script, as representatives and producers will sometimes request one. But no matter what, every spec must have a concise, compelling logline to describe it in emails, cover letters and conversation.

What should go in the logline and what shouldn't? Fundamentally, it's a brief (as the name implies, ideally one line) description of a screenplay's premise or concept. The logline should focus on the script's narrative "hook," or what makes that core idea original and compelling and thus able to hook our attention. To generate the drama every story needs, regardless of genre, the premise almost certainly involves a conflict of some kind between characters. Focus on that rather than details of the setting, character back-story, or sales talk (e.g., "a gripping thriller," "heartwarming family comedy" etc.). Verbally or in a query, you can set the stage with statements like these or comparisons to other movies ("It's *Ghost* meets *Old School*"), but the logline's job is to tell us at a glance what makes this script viable. That's it!

As Polonius said in "Hamlet," brevity is the soul of wit – loglines should **never** be more than two sentences or 50 words. Their function is not to encapsulate every major plot event, but instead to suggest the story's dramatic engine or the inciting incident that sets the whole narrative in motion (if that's the strongest hook). Generally speaking, the logline should introduce the hero or heroine (the protagonist or sometimes, an ensemble cast), what they want and the primary obstacles in their path (such as the antagonist).

Let's consider this example: "When a student is murdered during class, a fed-up inner-city teacher challenges the gangs that control the school and its neighborhood."

This logline has the who (an inner-city teacher), what (challenges the gangs) and why (he's fed-up when a student is murdered in his class). The perfect logline might tell us **how** he challenges the bad guys, particularly if he does so in a dramatic and original way, but it's also good to leave intriguing questions in the reader's mind ("How does he challenge them? What happens then?"). Try to use strong action words that vividly suggest the story's conflict.

The real art in writing loglines lies in getting readers to imagine how interesting your scenario must be as it plays out. Succeed in this and they are very likely to request your script. And as any writer knows, that's half the battle!

The Writer's Perspective: Directing Your Own Short Film

by Alan Woodruff

Thinking of directing your short film? It can be a long and arduous process. In many ways, it's the total reverse of writing; it's not just you, alone and cosy indoors with your word processor. Making a film involves negotiating, coordinating and working intensely with other people. It requires access to

Alan Woodruff is based in St. Kilda, Victoria, Australia. After his screenplay *Absolute Zero* won the 2004 PAGE Awards Gold Prize in the Short Film category, he produced, directed and edited the movie. The film has won a total of 19 awards at film festivals around the world. Alan is currently finishing a new feature script and preparing to shoot another short film.

specialized equipment and sometimes difficult-to-get and uncomfortable locations. It can also involve a lot of money for wages, insurance, equipment, film stock, lab costs, etc.

After my script *Absolute Zero* won a 2004 PAGE Award, I decided I wanted to test myself as a director and make the most impressive film I could. My ambition was to be as true to the script as possible on a miniscule budget.

As I couldn't afford to pay wages, I needed a cast and

crew prepared to work for reasons other than money. One of my actors, for instance, was just starting out in the business. He had been getting small TV roles and saw *Absolute Zero* adding a more substantial role to his credits. Most of the crew positions were filled by industry pros wanting to gain experience at a higher level of responsibility or by neophytes wanting a screen credit that might lead to paid work on other projects. With a few friends pitching in as well, I was set to shoot.

But shoot on what? I opted for 16mm, not because I had money to burn, but because I wanted to do some in-camera special effects that necessitated shooting on film. Today, of course, I'd be aiming to shoot on HD (high definition video), using 16mm only for the special effects sequence. We live in an exciting time as far as camera technology is concerned – HD capability now costs only a few thousand dollars. Couple this with Blu-ray discs and it's now possible to deliver images and audio of breathtaking


quality for a fraction of the previous cost. Part of my plan was to exploit the only resource I had in abundance: time. My strategy, which I'd negotiated with the cast and crew in advance, was to shoot the film over a couple of months as funds became available. The story's fragmented structure lent itself to this approach and it meant that I could begin shooting without having the entire budget in place. In hindsight, I see this as a mistake. Some of my volunteers developed "favor fatigue" as the open-ended schedule drained them of their enthusiasm for the project. Next time, I'd go into debt if I thought it was the only way to get the film in the can quickly.

My background is in post-production, so I was lucky when it came to the editing; the film was edited on my laptop at home, in coffee shops, wherever. I also taught myself several special effects programs so I could create most of the effects without having to involve others. While this was time consuming, it didn't cost anything and the project benefited enormously from the opportunity to make adjustments and add nuance to effects throughout the editing process.

The decision to finish the film on video rather than 16mm saved me thousands of dollars in film printing costs and meant I could have as many DVD copies making the rounds at festivals as I liked, instead of circulating one or two prints.

During the past two years, I've had the opportunity to screen the movie at many international film festivals and its unusual mix of styles has resulted in wins in various categories, including narrative, documentary and experimental. When all is said and done, despite the trials and tribulations involved in getting the film made, I'm proud of *Absolute Zero* and its success. I look forward to taking the lessons I've learned into my next project!

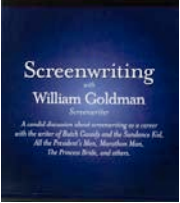
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The Judge's P.O.V.: The Meaning of Subtext

by Lauren Waldron

One of the hallmarks of a great script is exceptional dialogue, but I often come across screenplays loaded with flat exposition and dialogue that's too literal or "on-the-nose." While some scenes require exposition, a plot is never as interesting when flatly explained. It's much more intriguing when characters talk AROUND a subject – through subtext.

Subtext occurs when characters don't show their true feelings or say exactly what they mean. The subtlety of their words enriches the dialogue and gives the scene more depth. It also lessens predictability and gives the actors "something to chew on." Subtext can convey sexual tension or a romantic history. It can show glimpses of submerged or masked emotions when characters are being evasive (e.g., changing the subject to hide the truth). Subtext provides clues about the film's plot, theme and a character's inner life. Dramas, mysteries and thrillers rely heavily on subtext, while comedies use it through humorous sarcasm, double entendres or backhanded compliments – the meaning may go over another character's head, but the audience always "gets it."

Lauren Waldron studied film at the School of Visual Arts in New York and is a recent fellow of Film Independent's Screenwriters Lab in Los Angeles. She has worked in development at Propaganda Films and as a script supervisor and associate producer on films and commercials. She is currently in preproduction on her next indie feature.

To create subtext, you must know your characters inside out. Every character wants and needs something; they all have issues, fears and expectations. The focus of subtext is on what is NOT being said, or the manner in which the character's words are spoken.

In *Ordinary People*, Conrad catches up with Karen, a fellow psychiatric patient. There's a contradiction between dialogue and emotion as their small talk ("everything's great") hides their pain and the truth that they're still struggling. Karen repeatedly mentions her drama club activities to convince Conrad (and herself) that she's okay.

In *Birth*, Clara shows Sean her dirt-covered hands and says, "Look at how dirty my hands are." This line has more than one meaning. Yes, Clara's hands are literally dirty, but we eventually learn that they're figuratively dirty as well when her extramarital affair with Anna's husband is revealed. The line is also accusatory: Clara has been digging in the dirt, unable to find the love letters she buried earlier, and she suspects Sean has stolen them.

In *Michael Clayton*, Michael's friend Arthur metaphorically expresses guilt and self-loathing by calling himself "Shiva, the god of death." Michael later repeats this line when he goes after the people who orchestrated Arthur's murder. When Don Jeffries asks Michael's name, Michael responds: "I am Shiva, the god of death." The metaphor now expresses retribution and is a requiem for his fallen friend.

Subtext can also be conveyed with a physical gesture (actions speak louder), a look (the truth in the eyes), or through symbolism, a soundtrack, camera angles, etc. When a character reads, listens to music or watches TV, it's an opportunity to send a "message"

about the film's plot or characters. In *Ordinary People*, when Conrad's high-school class discusses Thomas Hardy's novel "Jude the Obscure," the teacher asks, "Do you think he was powerless in the grip of circumstances, or could he have helped himself?" This question exactly mirrors Conrad's predicament.

Ultimately, subtext is any alternate meaning to a character's words and the conscious or subconscious truth behind them.

In real life, people don't always reveal their true emotions, motives or desires. Similarly, in your film script every action, gesture or line of dialogue can have a double (or triple!) meaning, giving the audience an opportunity to read between the lines.

"Subtext occurs when characters don't share their true feelings or say exactly what they mean."

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What's Your Genre? Myth and Love Stories

by John Truby



Over the course of three decades, John Truby has taught more than 30,000 students the art of screenwriting. Using the knowledge and expertise he has applied as a consultant on over 1,000 movie scripts, he offers an approach to storytelling that has earned worldwide acclaim for his instructional courses and screenwriting software. He is also the author of [The Anatomy of Story](#). *Booklist* raves, "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, visit : www.truby.com

The praise for *Slumdog Millionaire* has been focused on Danny Boyle for his energetic and colorful direction, which is terrific. But the key to the film's success is the script by Simon Beaufoy. Using a unique story structure and scene weave, Beaufoy combines the myth and love genres with some advanced screenwriting techniques to build his story to a stunning climax.

Jamal is an orphan who grows up in Mumbai and ends up competing for the big prize on the game show, "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?" Here are just some of the difficulties inherent in the premise: a boy as main character, a story that covers ten years and a mix of myth and love story forms – two genres that are notoriously tough to put together.

Beaufoy's solution to the daunting challenges of his premise is a triple cross-cut framing device. In this advanced technique (see the Advanced Screenwriting Class and the Blockbuster story software for details), he cuts between Jamal being tortured by the cops who suspect he has been cheating, his performance on the game show, and the story of his life. This is a classic example of how a non-chronological structure is often right for a story. But it is very risky, because this much cross-cutting can suck out all the narrative drive.

So why does it work here? One of the problems with a story that covers many years is that it can become episodic, meaning that individual events stand out and don't build in a single narrative whole. A framing device puts brackets around these events. They are told from the mind of the hero, so they gain a unity they would not have if told chronologically by an omniscient narrator.

By beginning with the boy grown-up, being tortured, then cutting to his performance on the game show, Beaufoy brings the most dramatic element of Jamal's story to the front. The audience is constantly reminded of the story's most dramatic moment and it builds slowly and steadily as Jamal moves closer to winning the big prize. This also allows Beaufoy to connect the game show questions to the key events of the boy's life, a technique that not only undercuts the episodic feeling but also makes the thematic point that any life is a combination of chance, freedom and necessity.

The torture and game show lines solve another problem: they connect the myth form to the love story. Myth usually covers vast time and space. Love is compact, driven by white-hot passion that tends to dissipate if the story travels. The frame allows Beaufoy to establish Jamal's love at the beginning, though chronologically the hero encounters the girl of his dreams when he is little and doesn't see her for long stretches of his life.

Beaufoy was also fortunate that the original novel's author, Vikas Swarup, chose the picaresque tale as a basis. This is a comic myth in which the hero is a rogue-trickster from the lower class who succeeds by his wits, thus highlighting the corruption of society. This sub-genre is the basis of such classics as "Oliver Twist" and "Huckleberry Finn." In the "greatest techniques" section of the Blockbuster software, I talk about this rogue-trickster character as possibly the most important element in blockbuster films. Jamal is a schemer, able to succeed and escape death through his quick mind. Faced with terrible poverty and corruption, he survives and flourishes.

Slumdog Millionaire is worth careful study by any writer hoping to master advanced storytelling techniques and bring together genre forms in unique combinations.



Truby's Love Story Audio Course

This 4.5-hour course begins by talking about love itself and how most love stories are not love stories at all. Then it explains in detail how the subtle choreography of a true love story works, from the essential story beats to sub-genres, from love scenes and dialogue to how to write an enduring love story. If love is your message, this course will show you how to send it in the most appealing way possible.

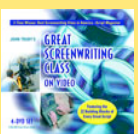
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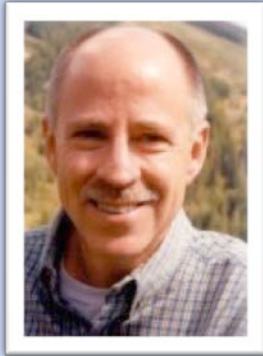
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Dave Trottier has sold screenplays and developed projects for The Walt Disney Company, Jim Henson Pictures, York Entertainment, On the Bus Productions, Hill Fields and New Century Pictures. As a script consultant he has helped dozens of clients sell their work and win awards. His book [The Screenwriter's Bible](#), now in its fourth edition, 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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Spec Writing Tips

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

We know that long before a script becomes a movie it is first a reading experience, and that we should avoid camera directions because that's the director's job. But there is a definite feel I wish to communicate in my first page. Here it is:

EXT. HIGHWAY 27 - DAY - AERIAL VIEW

WE SEE the lush Florida countryside until we FIND our subject, a dark blue van.

SLOW ZOOM IN ON VAN

VIEW ON VAN - MOVING

Two characters shout at each other while the CAMERA MOVES beside the van until we see the child/protagonist looking out the window at us.

INT. VAN

Everyone is quiet.

DAVE'S ANSWER:

I would not call the above a riveting "reading experience."

Notice in the above example that the focus is on *how* the story is told, not on the story itself. What is going on in the car? We don't know. Who are the characters? Why is the child looking out the window? What is his or her facial expression? Is the child a boy or a girl? We don't know because you are too involved *directing* your movie.

How can you improve this without sacrificing much in terms of the "feel" that you want to communicate? The revision that follows is not a masterpiece, but I hope you find it a better read than the original. Please note the implied camera directions, including the aerial view you want.

EXT. FLORIDA - DAY

From the Atlantic shore, lush countryside extends for miles westward.

Below, a black two-lane highway meanders through the spring growth.

A rusted-out van scoots down the highway.

EXT./INT. VAN - SAME

The van rumbles along.

Inside, two twenty-something parents, BUSTER and CAROL shout at each other, although their words cannot be heard.

Buster shoots an angry look to the back where LISA, age 6, leans away from him and stares out the window at the beautiful trees and shrubs whizzing by.

The child's eyes are sad. She sits motionless, looking trapped. One little hand presses the window.

The parents are silent now -- gathering steam before their next eruption.



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

Gimme a Break

[code: 1s7ew0u1ac]

Seeking completed, feature-length horror scripts about teens being bullied and seeking revenge, i.e. something in the vein of *Carrie*. Submissions must be for contemporary stories and should target a teen audience, which is to say we're looking for a contemporary horror script that will appeal to the *Twilight* crowd.

Our credits include *Color of Justice* and *Lifestories: Families in Crisis - Confronting Brandon: The Intervention of an Addict*.

WGA and non-WGA writers may submit. Budget has yet to be determined.

Top Pup Media

[code: ewsqn63hfy]

Looking for completed, feature-length action scripts from non-WGA writers. We are interested in well-developed action stories in the vein of *Bourne Identity*, *Mission Impossible* or James Bond. Can have elements of sci-fi, like *The Matrix* or *Equilibrium*. Most importantly, we are specifically looking for low-budget action scripts, which means no period pieces, epic battle scenes, intense car chases or heavy CGI.

Budget will be between \$200K and \$500K. Payment for script will be 3% of the initial shooting budget.

Our credits include *Fissure* and *The Imposter*.

Mad Samurai Productions

[code: ja102196dg]

Seeking completed, feature-length crime or thriller/suspense scripts from Canadian writers who've won screenwriting contests, or who've received good coverage from a coverage service like ScriptPIMP for the script being submitted. When submitting, please list your script's contest wins or coverage in the resume space provided. Please note that due to financing and tax-related reasons, we are only open to submissions from Canadian citizens at this point in time.

Non-WGA writers only, please. Budget will not exceed \$2 million.

Our credits include *Milo 55160* and we are in development on a number of features including *The Colony* and *Escape From Hell* with writer/director Michael Miner (*Robocop*).

Carpe Diem! Making Your Movie

by Jennifer Berg

Are you feeling frustrated because you can't get anyone to make your movie? Is the task of setting up your script with an agent or producer becoming too difficult? I say, take your career into your own hands. Make your own movie!

Many aspiring screenwriters are now making their own trailers, short films, and "guerilla" style low-budget features. With the advent of inexpensive digital cameras, home editing systems, and cutting-edge Internet marketing and distribution tools, it's becoming easier every day. Our 2004 Gold Prize winner Alan Woodruff did it. (Read all about his experiences in *The Writer's Perspective*, on page 2.) And if you have the desire and determination, you can do it, too!

Of course, shooting a movie – even a short film – is a huge and daunting task. Particularly if you don't have much filmmaking experience. So where do you begin? Here are some resources and ideas to help you make your dream a reality...

First, you need to get a good sense of what you're in for. If you haven't yet made a movie or gone to film school, you can get a basic overview of the whole filmmaking process from [The Action/Cut Filmmaking Seminar](#) or [Dov S-S Simens 2-Day Film School](#). These two short DVD courses are both available through the Writers Store, and both give you a great perspective on how a movie is made – soup to nuts. The fact is, every screenwriter should have a basic understanding of the filmmaking process, whether or not you actually want to shoot your own film. So make a point to take a class or read a couple of books about how it's done.

Next, once you have an overview of the whole process, it's time to write a business plan and create a budget for your film. This is not as hard as it sounds. Just get a copy of the excellent [Movie Plan Software](#), which contains easily editable forms and templates that you can customize for your production. At the same time, pick up a copy of [The Budget Book](#) by veteran unit production manager Bob Koster, which will take you line by line through every item in a film budget and further help you understand how movies are made. Then take your business plan and budget to potential investors and dazzle them with your vision!

Meanwhile, you need to assemble your team. You may be able to coerce friends and family members to do certain tasks for you. That's fine. But make sure you hire experienced people for the key positions. Try going to the film department of your local college or university to recruit talented cast and crew. There, you'll find people who know and love film who are hungry for the opportunity to work on your movie. If you can pay them even a small salary, you'll find the caliber of talent you'll attract will rise exponentially. But be sure to be very clear about the time commitment you expect from your cast and crew right up front, and put everything in writing. To make this process easy, use the [Showbiz Contracts](#) software, compiled by top entertainment attorney Mark Litwak. This terrific software provides you with all the standard agreements you'll need for your film – from financing through distribution.

Are you brave enough to make your own movie? It'll probably be one of the most exhausting and also most rewarding journeys you'll ever undertake. No matter what, once you've done it, I promise you'll have a whole new understanding and appreciation for the art of film. And, like Alan, I suspect you'll be hooked.

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