Loglines and Treatments: How to Write Them

COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

WRITING CENTER

THE LEARNING STUDIO

SPECIAL THANKS TO KATHERINE O'BRIEN

Loglines

- These are used to pitch your story in one-two sentences.
- They reduce the story to a "hook."

Your loglines should…

- Indicate the full narrative arc (the story's beginning, middle, and end)
  - *Structure the logline act by act*
- Reveal character, goal, conflict, and theme
  - *Unless iconic, do not mention character by name*
- Have an obvious "hook"
  - *Make us want to see the film!*
- Be concise, but thorough
  - *Two sentences are okay*

Ending a logline

- They should be open-ended. But, when writing industry coverage, include conflict resolution.

- Examples from *The Ramen Girl* (2008):
- **Open-ended for pitch:** *An aimless American woman, abandoned by her boyfriend in Tokyo, impulsively decides to train as a ramen chef under a master who is impossible to please.*

Ending a logline (continued)

- **Conflict resolution specified for studio coverage:** *An aimless American woman, abandoned by her boyfriend in Tokyo, impulsively decides to train as a ramen chef under a master who is impossible to please, and ultimately discovers her true calling and takes over his shop to carry on his legacy.*

- **Open-ended for the audience (from IMDB):** *An aimless American woman is stranded in Tokyo after breaking up with her boyfriend. Searching for direction in life, she trains to be a ramen chef under a tyrannical Japanese master.*

NOTE

LOGLINES AREN'T TAGLINES!!!

A TAGLINE IS A MARKETING TOOL TO GET YOU TO SEE THE FILM.

A formula for loglines

- **[Who, with an adjective] [faces what conflict] [learns/does what] [to pursue/achieve goal] [but the conflict is intensified] [the character passes the test/suggest thematic resolution]**

- **[Who, with an adjective]** *An aimless American woman,* **[faces what conflict]** *abandoned by her boyfriend in Tokyo,* **[learns/does what] [to pursue/ achieve goal]** *impulsively decides to train as a ramen chef* **[but the conflict is intensified]** *under a master who is impossible to please* **[the character passes the test/suggest thematic resolution]** *and discovers her true calling in life.*

Treatments

A HOW-TO GUIDE

What is a treatment?

- A detailed, scene-by-scene summary of the story

- Serves as extended outline for those developing story

- Treatment stage is when all involved may agree upon story structure, tone, message, and selling points

Length of treatments

- **Short films, no dialogue**: half the length of film (1 page for every 2 minutes)

- **Short films, with dialogue**: half the length of film (1 page for every 2 minutes)

- **Short documentaries**: no longer than the proposal (3-5 pages)

Length of treatments

- **Feature film**: 30 pages, MAXIMUM

  - Cover major turning points, detail sequences, summarize objective for each scene

  - 10:1 ratio—major turning point for every 10 pages of script should be 1 page of treatment

Treatment format conventions

- Do not use slug lines to set scene
- Just write the story: no interruptions, no embellishments
- Use active verbs
- What we see on screen should be conveyed in paragraphs without indentations—hit [return/enter] twice between paragraphs
- Avoid dialogue

Treatment format conventions

- Characters introduced in CAPS, followed by age in parentheses:
  - JOHN (22) flags the BARTENDER (50s). Orders a drink. John toasts the bartender.
- Describe only what is seen and heard on camera—no desires, emotions, or thoughts of characters
- Write in third-person, present tense

Treatment Checklist

CONCEPT IS CLEAR

MAIN IDEA IS ARTICULATED

WE GET WHAT STORY IS ABOUT

Treatment Checklist

THEME IS DEVELOPED

A MESSAGE TO THE STORY, ELEVATING THE CONFLICT

THE THEME IS A PREMISE THAT STRUCTURES THE NARRATIVE

Treatment Checklist

PLOT HAS AN ARC

CLEAR BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END

PROTAGONIST, GOAL, ANTAGONIST PRESENT

STAKES FOR CHARACTERS ARE CLEAR AND MATTER

CONFLICT IS RESOLVED

Treatment Checklist

CHARACTER HAS AN ARC

AVOID STEREOTYPES/CLICHÉS

CLEAR AND LOGICAL MOTIVATIONS/GOALS

OVERCOMES ISSUE/WEAKNESS

CHANGES FROM BEGINNING

Treatment Checklist

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

LIMITED TO WHAT IS SEEN AND HEARD

NO CHARACTER DESIRES/EMOTIONS

NO CAMERA DIRECTIONS

ACTION DOESN'T MERELY LIST PLOT POINTS