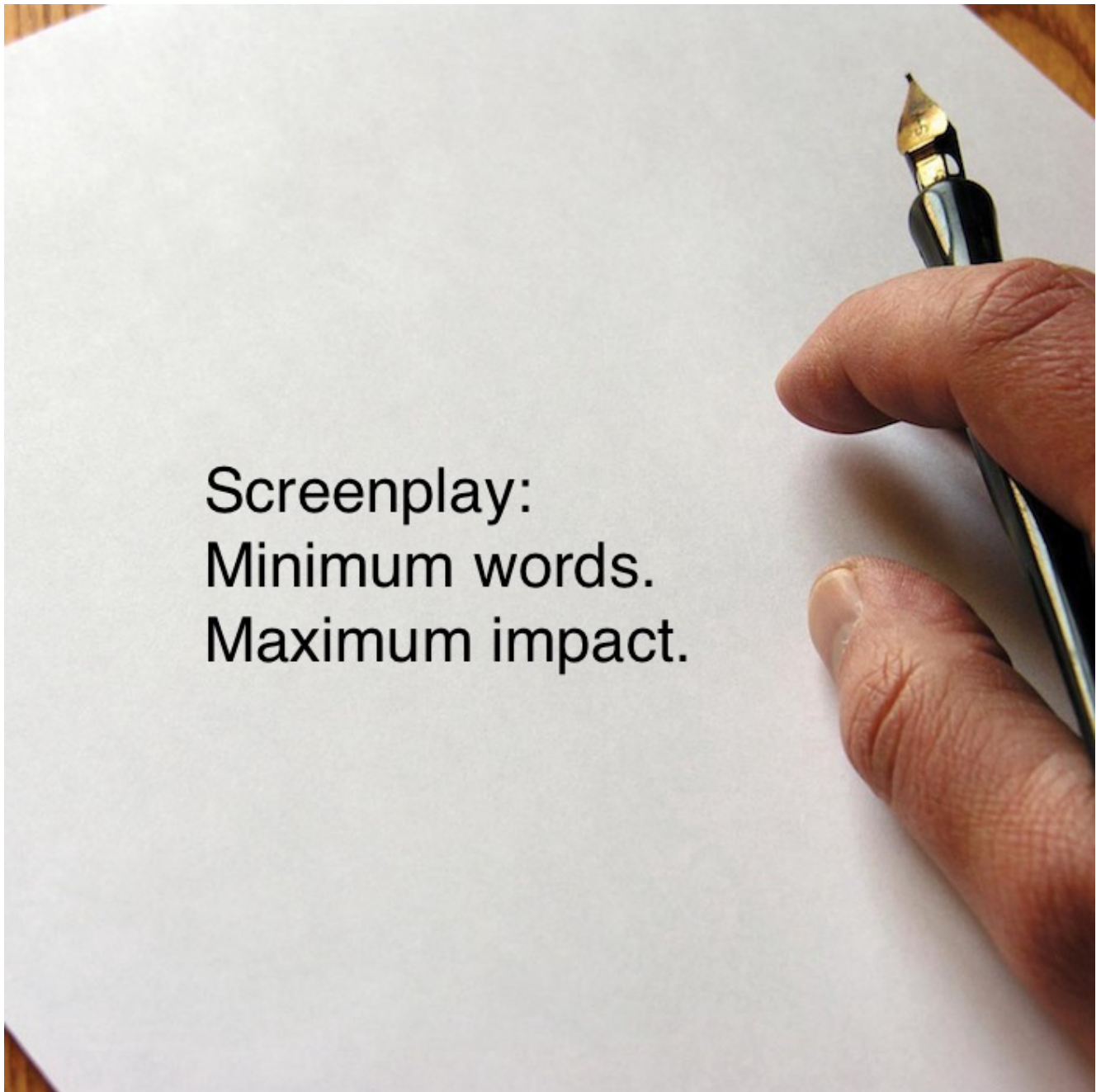


# 50 Things About Screenwriting

[Scott Myers](#)

Some observations about the craft I've come up with over the years.



Reminder to aspiring screenwriters: Movies are primarily a visual medium. They aren't called "motion pictures" for

nothing.

There are no screenwriting rules. There are conventions, patterns, paradigms. Know them, but don't let them constrain your creativity.

Every story has a physical journey and a psychological journey. The former has no meaning without the latter.

Sometimes the BEST dialogue is NO dialogue. The silence in the moment or between characters can speak volumes.

It is virtually impossible to overestimate the value of a strong story concept to the marketability of a spec script.

Screenplay: Minimum Words, Maximum Impact.

Three keys to learning the craft of screenwriting: Watch movies. Read scripts. Write pages.

Think character. Think plot. Think theme. But when you sit down to write a scene... feel.

One month for prep. Write 1 page per day. One month for revisions and editing. Do that and you complete 2 scripts per year.

There is no 'right' way to write. Every writer is different. Every story is different. Find the writing process that works for YOU.

Your characters exist. They WANT you to tell their story. Seek them out. They are your allies.

At the heart of your Protagonist's story are these questions: "Who are you? What will you become?" Their journey through the plot provides the answers.

A logline should SELL the story, not TELL the story. Don't over complicate it. Focus on what will hook a reader's attention.

When introducing characters in a script, focus less on physical description, and more on their psychological nature and personality.

Writing mantra: The only way out is through.

Need motivation? How about this: When you aren't writing... someone else is.

What is the point of the scene? If you can't answer this question, figure out the scene's purpose... or cut it.

Personal History: Everything that's happened to a character. Backstory: Events / dynamics specifically tied to your story's narrative.

Something to remember as you develop your characters: Each believes they are the Protagonist in their own story.

There is one incontrovertible, unassailable rule about a first draft and it is this: Get the damn thing done!

Scene description is more like poetry than prose. Active verbs. Vivid descriptors. Think of it as 'imagematic' writing.

Three Act Structure = Beginning, Middle, End. Works for stories, subplots, sequences, and scenes.

A compelling Protagonist-Nemesis relationship is one in which there is a psychological connection between them.

Dialogue = Conversation with a purpose.

Plot answers the question: What is the story about?

Theme answers the question: What does the story mean?

At a fundamental level, screenwriting is scene-writing.

Want drama? Ask a character: What do you fear the most? Then put them in a story where they have to face that fear.

Go beyond a character's 'flaw'. Think about Disunity, psychological and emotional dynamics creating inner conflicts that need resolution.

Begin with character. End with character. Find the story in between.

Voices in your mind may say, "Your story is no good.

Writing is too hard. You suck." Here's how you fight them:

Write the next sentence.

Zero in on the key relationships between each character and your Protagonist. Those are likely your story's major subplots.

The Whammo theory of screenwriting. Every 10 pages, something has to go "whammo". Good rule of thumb for plotting.

The Protagonist is almost always the central character in the movie. It is their goal, their journey that creates the spine of the Plot.

If you're having trouble getting started with your script, pick scenes from your story you WANT to write — any scenes — and write them.

Key question to ask about your story: Who is the audience? If you don't ask it, you can be sure potential buyers will.

Old Hollywood axiom: You are only allowed one coincidence per script. Otherwise your story feels like too much 'writer's convenience'.

You're not writing a script. You're writing a MOVIE.

Screenplays are written in the Present tense for a reason: Scenes unfold in the Moment giving the reader a sense of immediacy.

One goal when writing a scene? Give the script reader a good reason to move onto the NEXT scene.

You should have a personal connection with a story to find its emotional core and imbue its characters with life. Or else don't write it.

Think of the Nemesis as the Protagonist's negative self, the physicalization of what the Protagonist represses, the 'monsters' within.

Narrative Voice = Genre + Style.

No one knows the story better than your characters. When in doubt, trust THEM.

Simple plot. Complex characters.

A first draft is a journey of discovery. Don't worry about page count. Better to have more, then cut... than less, then pad.

Oftentimes the key to good dialogue is not what the character says, but what the character does NOT say.

Talisman: Physical object with symbolic meaning. Like the snow globe in Citizen Kane. The coin in The Dark Knight. Visual storytelling tool.

In a movie, action is meaningless without meaningful characters.

Writing a Story = Wrangling Magic.

Sometimes a simple observation can help give us the focus we need in our writing projects. Feel free to tack up any of these at your writing desk.