Reader Question: What to do with a 70 page screenplay?

[Scott Myers](#)

Is the story 'done' or can it be mined for additional content?

Question from @speero:

> I've written 70 pages on my first screenplay. The story is done. But a real screenplay has 110 pages. What to do?! :p

Let's just start with this: If your story really is "done," and if your script plays at a minute-per-page (that is not always true, depending upon the genre, amount of dialogue, action, etc), then you have a 70 minute movie (not figuring in 5 minutes or so for credits).

That is short by conventional standards with feature length movies at least 80 minutes long, most 10–40

minutes longer. However it is interesting to note that the guidelines for the [Sundance Film Festival](#) for submitting a narrative feature stipulate just 50 minutes length minimum.

Frankly, that surprises me. Sure, you may manage — against ginormous odds! — to get your movie into the Festival. But what buyer would step up and distribute a 50 minute film? Can't play in the local multiplex. Even at 70 minutes, that's a stretch.

I just checked. Even with the original *Paranormal Activity*, for example, a found footage contained thriller movie produced for two nickels, it clocked in at 86 minutes (figure 80 minutes less credits).

So there's this: If your story is done and it is 70 pages long, what you have is a movie that *technically* qualifies as a feature length movie, but short of a super low budget and a strong VOD performance, it looks like you're sort of in No Man's Land.

Let's consider another option: What if your story *isn't* done? What if you only think it's done?

I'd say it's time for a clean read with these two questions squarely and honestly in mind:

- Is this a movie? I mean *really* a movie? Can you imagine it opening on 3,000 screens on a Friday night? Or if it's an indie feature, can you imagine it

playing at Alamo Drafthouse and the like in a wide release [by indie standards]? In other words, is it big enough to be a feature length movie? If not, can you *make* it big enough?

- Have you exploited the concept to its fullest? Are there characters who are crying out for more attention? If there is even one more subplot you can discover lurking in your story universe, that could add 10–15 pages depending upon how 'rich' that narrative content is. Or you may have another plot twist leading to a substantive set piece waiting to be built up and out.

In other words, maybe there is more in your story universe than meets your current eyes... hence, the need for a clean read.

I'm guessing that's the case. You're cut some slack because you have no personal point of reference, seeing as this is your *first* screenplay. In my experience, first-time writers can almost always benefit by digging deeper into their story and characters.

Of course, *done* is a relative term with many professional writers subscribing to the theory that a story is never completely done.

Whatever you do, do **not** pad your script. Adding 20 pages or more of 'stuff' just to have a higher page count will hurt you, rather than help because (1) the fluff will

contrast markedly from your supposedly good content and (2) readers will hate wading through the extraneous content.

No, the only way to legitimately get the script to 90+ pages is to find content worth exploring, then dig into that material, and exploit it in a way that adds to your story as a story.

The first step in determining that: Give your script a clean read.

By the way, are you reading movie scripts? The more you do, the more of a sense you will get about the feel, flow, pace and length of a screenplay.

Anybody else have suggestions for @speero?

P.S.: Congratulations on getting to FADE OUT on your first script!

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