

# Writing Monologues

[Scott Myers](#)

Don't do it... unless your character mandates you do it. Then if you do it... write the ever-loving hell out of it.



The USS Indianapolis monologue in 'Jaws'

Every so often, one of my university students will turn in script pages in which a character delivers a monologue ("a long speech by one actor in a play or movie"). More often than not, the monologue doesn't hold up.

I will ask the student: Why a monologue? And almost invariably, they hit me up with this: Quentin Tarantino.

Tarantino is a master of monologues. There's nothing wrong with *aspiring* to write like him. It's just... he's so damn **good** at it, there is this mythical bar which any writer has to hit when they write a monologue.

To be clear, it's not just Tarantino. Consider these monologues:

And perhaps the greatest of them all:

I show my students these clips. Not to intimidate them, but to inspire them. *If you write a monologue, you have to write the ever-loving shit out of it.*

But don't even **think** about writing a monologue unless it is mandated by who the character is... where they find themselves in the story... and why they feel compelled to drop a truth-bomb into a scene.

For that's what almost all monologues are: Truth-bombs. They involve a character coming clean... a revelation of something they hold near and dear to their heart... a mini-story which they are **compelled** to share because they *need* to share it... and it *needs* to be shared at that precise moment in the story.

I have added two monologues to the list for my students to consider. Both of them come from the brilliant HBO TV series 'Barry'. In this first monologue delivered at the end of the first episode Season 1, Barry (Bill Hader) is a hit man who through a twisted series of events has found himself in a Hollywood acting class. He is horrible. But he so desperately wants to be doing something different with his life, he clings to a tiny shred of hope that acting might be it. Unfortunately, the man who runs the acting group Gene (Henry Winkler)... well... watch the scene.

Barry shares an intimate truth with Gene. Of course, Gene thinks Barry is making it up. But the monologue serves two purposes: (1) It is a confession Barry needs to make... to someone... anyone... because his life is falling apart. (2) It also advances the plot because Gene, thinking Barry is acting when in fact he's delivering a truth-bomb, invites Barry to continue with the acting class.

That is a great monologue, but in Season 2, co-writers Hader and executive producer Alec Berg top it with one of the most amazing pieces of writing and acting (by Sarah Goldberg) I've seen like... ever.

The setup: Barry is rehearsing for an audition for a movie role. Sarah, who is Barry's girlfriend and also an actor, has been struggling with a scene she is going to perform for a theater full of industry types, based on her own life experience, mirroring the truth-bomb of Barry's monologue above. Watch this clip and behold the neck-twisting bends and turns of Sally's character as she processes everything going on in her life just now.

This monologue **has** to happen because Sally is completely at 6s and 7s with herself. Her words reflect her personal chaos crashing up against a train wreck she imagines is going to take place when she does her live performance. She is scared. Angry. Crazy. Manic. Depressed. Confused. Jealous. And trying to be happy for Barry... but it's just... not... working.

It's a truth-bomb. And she cannot **not** deliver it.

Takeaway: If you see a monologue emerging in your story-crafting process, ask yourself two things:

- Is it something a character absolutely **must** tell at this specific point in this particular story or at all?
- Does it come close to the bar set by other screenwriters and delivered by actors of other famous movie monologues?

Movies — and increasingly TV — are primarily visual mediums. If you write a monologue, you better make sure you've got a truth-bomb worth delivering.