

The First Draft is a Journey of Discovery

[Scott Myers](#)

"As a writer, when you put something down, you make something happen."



I began teaching in 2001, first as a hobby, now full-time as an assistant professor at the [DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts](#) and since 2010 through my own online educational resource [ScreenwritingMasterClass.com](#). In that time, I have taught — quite literally — thousands of writers. Over time between my own writing and my teaching, one truth I have discovered is this:

A first draft is a journey of discovery.

No matter how much or how little you may have broken your story in prep, the actual writing of the first draft is going to reveal new and different aspects of the narrative universe and its characters.

I have worked with writers who start with extensive scene-by-scene outlines, then pound out the draft which mirrors that structural breakdown.

I have worked with writers who begin with an outline, then find their characters veering off into new and surprising directions, as well as their story with it.

I have worked with writers who type Fade In knowing very little about the story structure, but a lot about their characters.

I have worked with writers who only know their story's Four Primary Plotline Points — Story Beginning, Act One End, Act Two End, Story ending.

I have worked with writers who begin only with the Protagonist and their story concept.

Some have sailed through the first draft process, others have struggled to get to Fade Out.

No matter what a writer brings with them to initiate their page-writing process, it has proved to be universally true that the first draft has been a journey, both practically in pounding out pages and psychologically in their connection

to the unfolding narrative, and along the way...

They discover things.

New scenes. Surprising moments. Character revelations.
Plot twists.

Themes. Talismans. Visuals. Subplots.

That is why I **always** encourage writers to approach the first draft from a *feeling* place.

*Don't think so much as **feel** your way through the writing of each scene, that initial pass at your story.*

Don't worry about page count... or scene length... scene description... or transitions between scenes.

Rather, as you get ready to write each scene, close your eyes and take some deep breaths... shift from *your* world into the *story* world.

Get in touch with that scene's characters.

Feel what **they** are feeling.

Where are they emotionally? Where are they psychologically? What personal energy are they bringing to the beginning of the scene? What is their goal in that scene and how will they best go about attempting to accomplish it?

Align yourself with your characters... and *feel* your way through the writing of that scene... and the next scene... and the next... your first draft.

You will have **plenty** of time in rewrites to bring your executive mind to bear on each scene... focusing... sharpening... cutting... tightening... making each scene a lean, tight, solid read.

But...

At the end of the day, perhaps the single most important goal for you as a screenwriter is to write a script...

Which makes the reader **FEEL** something.

If your script can do that, it will stand out from the myriad of screenplays which follow some formula or paradigm perfectly, but offer thinly drawn characters and minimal emotional life.

Indeed, if your script can create an emotional connection with a reader, that means you have embraced the spirit of the first draft as a journey of discovery.

You have given yourself over to your story's characters and at every step of the way, allowed them to lead you into and through the page-writing process.

You may very well end up with a messy, flawed, overlong, overwritten first draft, but if in that journey from Fade In to Fade Out, you have tapped into the lives of your story's

characters where they lift up off the page and into the imagination of a script reader...

You. Have. Won.

Here is something I wrote the other day to a writer I have been working with:

Clearly, you are making progress with this approach, essentially 'feeling' your way into and through the story, writing scenes however you need to in the moment: some fully fleshed out, others sketched out, still others with a simple description to mark what should go where.

I say: Keep doing this!

As discussed, the first draft is best looked at as a 'journey of discovery' in that by putting it together, even in rough form, you are *learning* about the characters, *learning* about the structure, *learning* about the themes. The simple act of putting scenes down onto the page forces you to engage your story, make choices, and see where that process takes you.

You know going in a first draft will not be perfect. Rather than perceiving that as a *negative*, think of it as a **POSITIVE**: "*Hey, I don't have to get this completely right. I'm free to flop around creatively and see what happens.*"

By putting something down, you make something happen. And *then* you can go about rewriting it, honing it, smoothing

it out.

The original title Paul McCartney gave to the song 'Yesterday' was "Scrambled Eggs." Those were the first words which came to mind as he was composing the lyrics, just so he had something to sing.

He put something down and made something happen.

I encourage you to do the same by continuing to do what you're doing.

There is no right way to write. Each writer is different. Each story is different. Some may lay out perfectly. Others may be a struggle every step of the way.

But that first draft? That is a journey of discovery.

The more you embrace that spirit...

The more you acknowledge it will be an imperfect iteration of your story...

The more you give yourself over to your characters and *feel* your way through your initial pass at each scene...

The more you put something down... the more you will make something happen...

And the more discoveries you will make on that journey.

Onward!

UPDATE: My 10-week online [Pages I: Writing the First Draft workshop](#) begins August 23rd! It's the only time I will be offering it in 2021. It's a great way to motivate and support you through your own journey of discovery from Fade In to Fade Out!