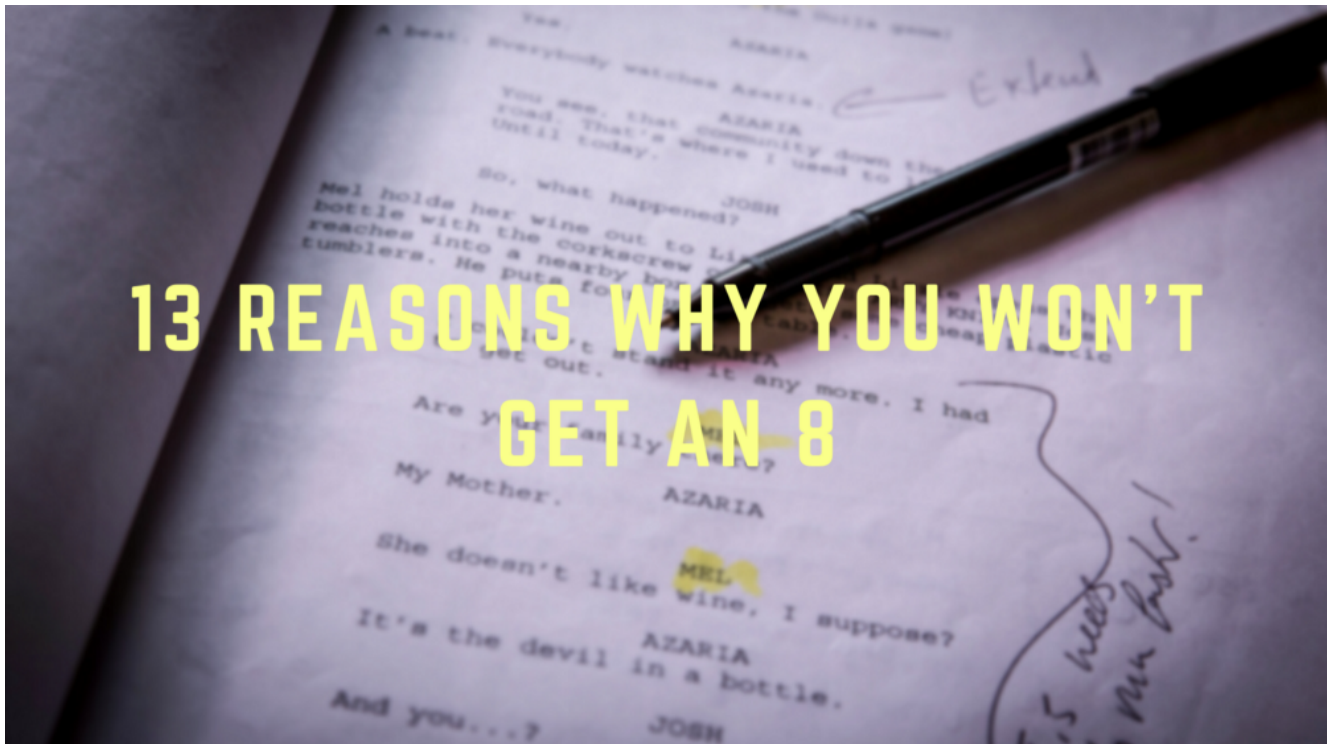


# THE 13 MOST COMMON MISTAKES FOUND ON A SCRIPT



Writing a script is not easy and impresses the reader even less. Add to that a professional script analyst who has read thousands of scripts throughout his or her career, and you can identify a bad script in the good cart in record time.

What a screenwriter should remember is that the analyst is not trying to destroy or criticise his work, but move the project forward, with constructive criticism and useful comments.

There are a series of mistakes, which screenwriters make again and again when writing their first script. While these mistakes are avoidable, it's hard to prevent them while you

are writing. Therefore, we've talked to our curation team to make a list of the 13 most common mistakes in the writing (the ones that throw your script into the bin):

## **1. Format DOES matter**

Sometimes, the screenwriter decides that the format is not meaningful because the content of his/her script is brilliant. We don't deny that it can be true, but it's a beginner's mistake to ignore the format. The fact that you're making the reading more difficult by adding a distraction, harms the reader's motivation. In addition, the statement that comes across to the analyst or the producer is that you're not professional. I'd say it's more harmful than orthographic errors or typos. This goes without saying that you should be on the lookout for those before submitting.

Besides, there are free alternatives to paid software that help you avoid this. I recommend getting the professional software as they offer more utilities and at the end of the day, it's a tool that you're constantly going to use. But at this point, let's review the options we have easy access to.

Paid Software: Final Draft, Writer Duet, Movie Magic Screenwriter. Free: Celtx, Fade In.

## **2. The extension of the script**

This gets overlooked when in reality it's one of the most important points. If your first script's length is 120 pages,

make sure they're justified. If it's longer than 120 pages, revise it because that could mean there are scenes the story could do without. If a feature film script counts around 60 pages or less, it's likely to have pacing and structure problems or that you don't spend enough time setting the characters or the plot. When it comes to TV series, pilots longer than 60 pages are often penalised by production companies that often demand shorter screen time. On occasion, they might ask for scripts shorter than 50 pages.

Make sure that your script has the adequate length to the characteristics and the genre of your project.

### **3. Do not underestimate the power of the first 20 pages.**

I say 20, but it could be 10. In that time, the reader must know what the story is about, its genre. Which are the main characters and the tone of your story. If your script can't answer these questions in less than 10 pages, rewrite it, because you risk confusing the reader or worse, bore the audience. If you can give all this information and start with a strong scene, even better. An image is worth a thousand words. Keep the reader interested so he/she will follow until the end.

### **4. Literary and boring descriptions**

Writing a script is not writing a novel. It's one of the main

boulders for a screenwriter attempting to adapt a fiction novel but one that is also common among original scripts. Unnecessarily extended action paragraphs, or in detail descriptions of the character, drive the reader back. One must know *what* information is necessary and which ones you can prescind of. Here are some things to avoid:

- Description of spaces or the physique, personality and costume of the characters: unless it's necessary for the plot, the reader is not interested because that is information that can be found in the Bible or the dossier.
- Describe characters' feelings: if it is not something noticeable on the screen then it's unnecessary information. In the end, this is an audiovisual medium with which you have to use that language, *show without saying*.
- Acting as director: you're writing for the screen but describing how the camera is going to move or which shot will be used in each scene, it is not your job as a screenwriter.

A good example [to study >>](#)

## 5. Characters without conflict

If your characters are not interesting, your story will be boring for the reader. Nothing bothers more than flat, unnecessary characters. When writing your characters, be patient. You don't want to reveal too quickly or force their

transformation arcs. Change does not come alone, you need conflicts to find their resolution and these take their time. Conflict is what drives the plot.

Ask yourself if all the characters are essential to the development of the plot and if they interact properly with the other characters. If you're not convinced, reinvent or eliminate that character so he has a reason to exist.

## **6. Forced and explicative dialogues**

It is a criticism that is repeated very often among readers because it is one of the easiest elements to detect when you have read thousands of scripts. Dialogue should have subtext, things that are said without having to be said verbally.

If a character, through a dialogue, expresses their feelings or speaks about their background it ceases to be interesting. Another of the most common mistakes when writing the first script is to try to make dialogues too intelligent, in the sense that they are so intelligent that they seem forced and unreal. The dialogues must be organic and honest. In addition, all the dialogues have to contribute to the plot or the characters. If they are not, they are no longer necessary in your script and become straw. To give an example, Noah Baumbach's *Story of a Marriage* manages to avoid all these things and explain a very simple and sincere story between a marriage thanks to dialogues where what is important is not what is said but precisely

what is not said.

## **7. Unachieved plots & subplots**

As important as the main plot is, so are the subplots. Sometimes, the writer underestimates the power of the sub-plots. Everything in the script is a cog. Subplots have to bring something to the main plot. The problem comes when once they have added to the main plot they are neglected and not closed. This creates the same feeling of dissatisfaction in the reader as when the plot is left unfinished. If it wasn't so important why tell?

## **8. Lose sight of the genre(s) of your project**

Even if it doesn't seem likely, it's a mistake that happens quite often and that can cause you to completely lose the direction of your project. It sounds obvious to say it but if you have an action script on your hands it must have action scenes; if it is a comedy it must have gags and if it is a thriller it must have moments of tension. Each genre has a series of formulas and conventions that define them and that must be applied to the script. Not following them can waste a lot of time fighting the tide. In addition, when selling your script, it can play against you as you may not be selling it to the right target.

Currently, there are analysis services that, via artificial

intelligence, can identify via your script and other metrics the type of project you have in your hands, by objectively identifying the genre of your script.

## **9. Absence of memorable scenes**

The ability to recall a movie is often determined by the ability of the screenwriter to create memorable scenes. How many times do we go to a movie and we remember almost nothing of the plot? However, there are scenes that we retain in the memory for their dramatic or visual importance. To give you an example, in the series *Lost* we all remember the moment "Not Penny's boat" or *Braveheart's* "Freedom" dying scream.

## **10. Neglecting the universe and verisimilitude**

We've decided to put these two concepts together because they often go hand in hand. First of all, the screenwriter must know perfectly the universe he has created and its rules whether his screenplay is a comedy, historical or science fiction. All universes have their own rules and the reader must be aware of them. But sometimes the screenwriter knows the universe he has created so well that he forgets to reflect it in the script making the reader, apart from not understanding it, lose information as the universe directly affects the plot and the characters.

On the other hand, all elements must be plausible, which does not mean they are real. This means that absolutely everything that happens within your story has to be credible within the universe you have created. Everything needs to be tied together so that even if it's the weirdest thing you may have come up with, the reader will believe it within the framework of your story.

## **11. Predictability**

Everyone has referents, which is good to have to profile your project but don't let them take too much space in your work. One of the hardest things for a screenwriter is to avoid predictability. Unconsciously, one ends up using characters, images, plots and structures that are stored in one's memory. And in the end, end up applying a very similar version in their script.

The trick lies in playing with the mind of the reader. Give him a bait to bite so he thinks he's smart enough to guess the next step in your story and then surprise him by taking the story elsewhere. There's nothing more satisfying to a reader than to be broken. In *Parasites*, for example, the appearance of the basement would be one of these elements that break with predictability.

## **12. Addressing sensitive issues in a superficial and stereotypical manner**



As in real life, when talking about sensitive issues like, for example, religion, politics and sex you have to be lead-footed because, apart from risking being boring, if you fall into the stereotype you can become offensive. This is not to say that we should not talk about these but, on the contrary, we must try to treat them from depth and offer an interesting point of view that contributes to both the characters and the plot. This is what will make your script add up.

## **13. Forgetting the message**

You must keep the theme and the message you want to discuss at the forefront throughout the writing process. It is the reason why the writer has decided to write that story, that's what he wants to tell us. Therefore, all elements must be at the service of the message you want to deliver. Why do I tell this story? What do I want the reader to think about? A project that doesn't have a clear message behind it loses relevance.

Don't miss our latest Screenwriting Contest!