

# Tweetstorm: Ed Zwick on Screenwriting

[Scott Myers](#)

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“Periods of great creativity are often punctuated by barren stretches. The worst thing is to stop writing. Keep plugging away: it may be shit but it’s your shit. ‘All good ideas start out as bad ideas,’ says Steven Spielberg, ‘...that’s why it takes so long.’”



Twitter can be a gold mine for writers. Case in point, when pro writers generate a tweetstorm about the craft. A few days ago, Ed Zwick (@EdwardZwick1) put together a [series of tweets about screenwriting](#). He knows what he’s talking

about, not only as a screenwriter, but also producer and director with such credits as *thirtysomething*, *Once and Again*, *Glory*, *Legends of the Fall*, *Courage Under Fire*, and *The Last Samurai*. Reprinted here by permission.

There's a lot to like here including this:

### *8.LET'S GET PERSONAL*

*All good writing is personal. That doesn't mean autobiographical. Whether a period piece or a sci-fi space opera, characters aren't created, they pre-exist and must be found within you. Imagine yourself as a sinner or a saint and you'll find their voices.*

That reminds me of this from Joseph Campbell:

*The passage of the mythological hero may be over ground, incidentally; fundamentally it is inward — into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revived, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world... [Now] it appears that the perilous journey was a labor not of attainment but reattainment, not discovery but rediscovery.*

Here is where the hero's journey matches up with the writer's journey. For just as a character's **outer** journey in the physical world of space and time is "fundamentally" an **inner** journey into their psychological world of hopes and fears, so, too, ours as writers. As Zwick suggests, the characters in our stories "pre-exist and must be found within you."

**That** is the key to writing personal stories. And **that** is the key to engendering an emotional connection between the audience and our story's characters.

Here is the tweetstorm as saved by @threadreaderapp.



**Edward Zwick** @EdwardZwick1

Nov 30, 2021 · 12 tweets · EdwardZwick1/status/1465688562693259273

## SCREENWRITING



### 1. COUNTING PAGES

You're going backwards. Each step has obliged you to back-fill. Don't despair, the best souffle is made beating egg whites by hand. Just when you're ready to give up, they peak. Take it out of the oven too soon, it collapses. Food metaphors work every time.

### 2. THE HARVEST

Periods of great creativity are often punctuated by barren stretches. The worst thing is to stop writing. Keep plugging away: it may be shit but it's your shit. "All good ideas start out as bad ideas," says Steven Spielberg, "...that's why it takes so long."

### 3. ADAPTATIONS

Screenwriting is more like poetry than prose. One thing stands in for many; motivation is inevitable reductionist; the inner life expressed in externalized action. A great book beguiles you for a week; a movie holds your interest for two hours if you're lucky.

### 4. THE COMFORT ZONE

Harrison Ford pulled out of TRAFFIC because "...my fans don't want to see me in something like this." That same complacency is dangerous to a writer's career. Everybody wants to label you. Be a moving target.

#### 5. "GET ME REWRITE!"

LB Mayer asks Fitzgerald for a scene about a troubled marriage. He writes 12pp. Mayer calls in a studio hack who writes: "A husband and wife are in an elevator. The doors open, a pretty woman enters. The husband ogles her. The wife sees it. The doors close."

#### 6. A HORROR STORY

The show runner pitches the studio head a show: a widower raising his family with the ghost of his dead wife. "I like it," says the exec, "but what if the dad is a detective?" Thinking it's a joke, the writer laughs. His overall deal is cancelled the next day.

#### 7. THE LIGHTBULB, REDUX

Herewith, an imagined conversation between a development executive and an esteemed playwright who has just pitched his Pulitzer-winning play: "I just have two questions, Mr. Miller. Does he have to die? And does he have to be a salesman?"

#### 8. LET'S GET PERSONAL

All good writing is personal. That doesn't mean autobiographical. Whether a period piece or a sci-fi space opera, characters aren't created, they pre-exist and must be found within you. Imagine yourself as a sinner or a saint and you'll find their voices.

#### 9. LET'S GET PERSONAL, PT. II

Why write something personal when the studios want superheroes? The secrets you think are yours alone are the ones people will respond to. Ask yourself, what is my own story about? What is it REALLY about? And why the fuck should anyone care?

#### 10. LET'S GET PERSONAL, PT. III

In his Nobel prize acceptance speech, Orhan Pamuk identified shame as the writers' ally. By confronting those mortifying aspects of ourselves we touch what is common to all of us. Read Emerson's essay on "Self-Reliance."

P.S. "First you have nothing, and then, astonishingly, after ripping out your brain and your heart, you have something." -- T.C. Boyle

Twitter: @EdwardZwick1. I **definitely** recommend following Ed as he pretty regularly tweets threads about filmmaking, directing, screenwriting, and the film and TV business.

For more screenwriter tweetstorms, go [here](#).