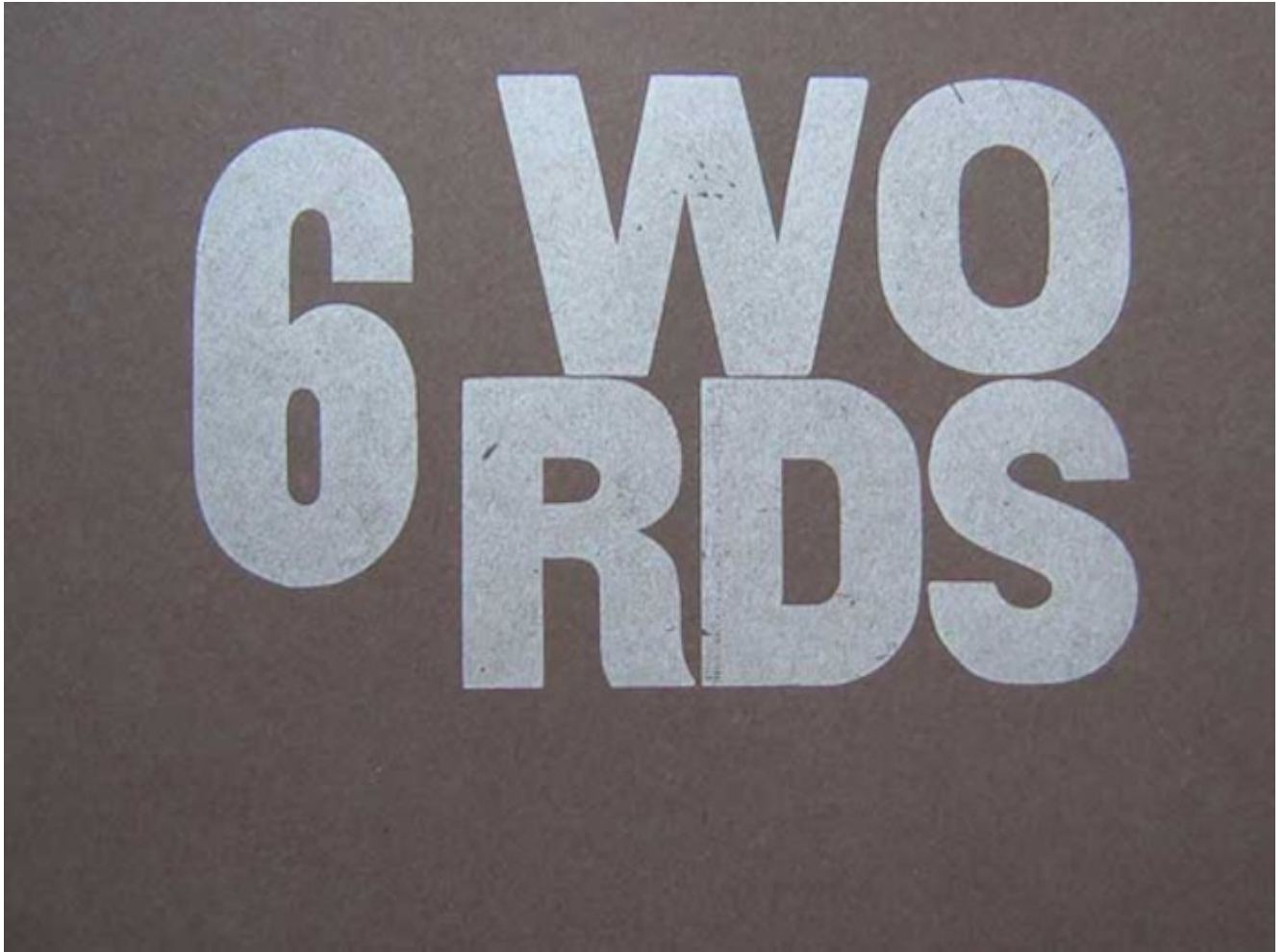


The Six Word Test

[Scott Myers](#)

If you're having trouble finding the focus of your story, try this test.



This all started with a bromide from [Max Millimeter: Hollywood Movie Producer Extraordinaire](#) about his approach to loglines:

That's why I have the six-word rule. You got six words... count 'em... one, two, three, four, five, six... six words in your logline to get my attention. If six words in your logline don't come right at me, high and hard, and knock me on my keister, then you ain't getting my

attention. And your story? That's a big fat Pasadena.

Then when I did an [interview with screenwriter Daniel Kunka](#), he recounted how he came up with the idea for "Agent Ox," a spec script he wrote which ending up [selling to Sony Pictures](#):

I made a document called "High Concept Story Ideas" and just brain dumped a bunch of stuff down for two or three days, and the very last idea in this document were the six words "Human Spy on an Alien Planet" and I knew that was it.

I always joke in meetings now that those were the six words that changed my career and how I think about writing screenplays, but it's the absolute truth...

If you want to write at a studio level, you must be able to communicate big ideas in simple terms. That's how specs climb the food chain. If an assistant reads your script and loves it, that six-word idea will make it that much easier for the assistant to sell it to his or her boss, and then for that producer to sell it to the studio and that studio to sell it to marketing and hopefully, marketing to sell it in a three minute trailer to the entire world to get people to come see your movie.

Apart from being a great way to test potential ideas for their marketability, I have found the Six Word Test to be a valuable story development tool — to see how well I understand the story by forcing me to drill down into its

essence.

For example, here is my six word take on *K-9*:

Loner cop. New partner. Police dog.

Here is my six word take on *Trojan War*:

Infatuated boy. Dream girl. Find condom.

A great concept often will indicate what the story is as well as its commercial potential.

So, if you've got a story which has you confused, do this: Try your hand at a logline or short summary. Then zero in on the six words in your description which do the best job communicating the essence of your story.

Yes, it's a challenge, but it's also a great story development tool.

This has been another edition of Dumb Little Writing Tricks That Work.

For more articles in the series, go [here](#).