

STORY DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

Writing a Synopsis

ONE PAGER / SYNOPSIS DEVELOPMENT

When writing a synopsis you can get away with 1 page if you have a really dynamic idea. A synopsis can be 2 or 3 pages, but you risk boring the reader. A good rule of thumb is to have half a page for the 1st Act, a full page for the 2nd Act, and half a page for the 3rd Act, reflecting the general proportions of a script.

My good friend Mike Mitchell, an experienced director, has extensive experience pitching projects around “Hollywood”. Most of them did not work out. That’s common. He describes the pitch process as a sales tease. If someone likes your logline then you pitch or send your synopsis. If they like your synopsis then you are asked for a treatment, which is the full story with detail but not in script form.

I have a hunch if you wrote two concise sentences per each Blake Snyder beat, then an additional sentence to clearly describe the emotions of your characters at the end of each beat, you would be very close to having a synopsis. There would still be a lot of work editing and refining but you would be well on your way.

The guidelines from the site below are a great place to start.

<http://www.greenlightmymovie.com/write-film-synopsis-get-results/>

Here are some proven strategies:

1. Begin your synopsis with a log line. Before you actually tell your story, state your premise. This will set your readers’ expectations and allow them to better visualize the tale you’re about to tell. A logline should be one or two sentences long and contain irony if at all possible. Basically describing where the screenplay is at the end of Act I, a logline should include the protagonist(s), the protagonist’s central problem and a sense of what’s at stake. (Example: “A put-upon teenage boy accidentally travels 30 years into the past where he inadvertently interferes with his mother and father’s first meeting. While trying to find a way back to the future, he must try to make his mis-matched parents fall in love or he will never be born.”)

2. Start with Your Lead Character in Motion. Immediately establish what your hero is trying to achieve when the story opens. Get the reader quickly invested in your protagonist’s success.

3. Establish Clear Cause-and-Effect Connections. Synopses aren't just chronologies, a set of events related in chronological order. Write as to clearly connect your story's events in terms of character expectations, actions taken, effects experienced and new plans formulated. As much as what happens, we need to know why they happen. (Because of that...because of that...because of that)

4. Focus on Emotions. And write them BIG. Readers don't just want love, they want PASSION. They don't just want fear, they want TERROR. They don't just want sadness, they want EMOTIONAL DEVASTATION. As your page count contracts, what remains must be concentrated and deliver a strong visceral impact.

5. Include Your Major Set-Pieces. Set-pieces are large, unified scenes of action, humor or drama. They are the big sequences that make your screenplay unique and memorable. Although your synopsis is necessarily abbreviated, take time in your telling to describe three or four big set-pieces, as these are ultimately your script's biggest selling points.

6. Think Cinematically. Use nouns, verbs and adjectives that have strong visual elements. Painting word pictures helps the reader see not just your story, but your movie.

7. Go Out with a Bang. As noted earlier, good endings help sell a screenplay. Even more so, a synopsis. Leave your reader with the feelings you want paying audiences to experience at your final fade out. Ultimately, your synopsis is your movie in miniature, so it must necessarily suggest the intellectual/emotional/spiritual impact of the full, final product.

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