

AVOIDING THE WRATH, AVOIDING THE TRASH

**How to get your screenplay
past the Hollywood gatekeepers**

The Script Reader

*Screenplay advice and coverage
from an agency professional*

**Top
5
Biggest
Blunders**

In the Spec Script Game

121.

Truth: The reader is probably not going to be as into your story as you are.

Reality: You must learn to kill your babies. That's screenwriter lingo for cutting something that you really like for the sake of the story. Sometimes what you cut is good, but it helps the pace of the piece to extract it. Sometimes what you cut is bad and never should have been there in the first place. However, anything you can say in 121 pages you can say in 112 pages. I have a reader friend who will pass on a script if it's over 120 pages without even reading it. That doesn't mean if you're Quentin Tarantino you can't write a script that's 197 pages. But wait until you've made a hundred million dollar picture and won an Oscar.

General rule: If the reader knows who you are and is a fan of your work, then you don't need my advice. If you're still working at Starbucks and this is your first script, keep it short, Coppola. 105 pages is a very respectable length. And it'll make the reader happy. Fewer than 100 and we'll think you're an amateur at first sight. So be careful.

LEARN TO KILL YOUR BABIES

TOO MUCH BLACK

Truth: Script Readers are tired, lazy and pissed off. The less they have to read the happier they'll be. Whether they admit it or not, the second a reader gets a script, they flip through it to see how much "black" it has. Meaning how much dense black typing riddles the white paper. Are there pages that have dialogue chunks that run the whole page?

Reality: In an easy read, there is a lot of dialogue, in a generally competent script there is an even distribution between dialogue and stage direction. That's not to say that some incredible screenplays have giant chunks of dialogue that run a page or more. Tarantino does. But usually first time screenwriters aren't writing dialogue that crackles like Mr. Brown. It's usually fizzles.

ACTION \approx DIALOGUE

LEGGO YOUR EGO

Truth: Most readers are struggling writers themselves and have worked very hard to get the “privilege” of reading your script. Therefore you are automatically dealing with someone who’s going to get irritated at any attempts at egotism.

Reality: If you haven’t made a film, nor sold a script, nor have any actual employees on your payroll then DON’T put the name of your production company on the cover of your screenplay. I don’t care if Three Guys and a Zucchini Films is a funny inside joke between you and your bros. I can tell right from the get-go that you’re trying to seem bigger than you are, especially if you put your home address below your production company name.

A LITTLE BIT OF
HUMILITY
GOES A LONG WAY

YOU CAN'T PROOF IT!

Truth:

Proofreading is hard.

Reality:

If you don't do it, you'll piss off someone like me. The way I figure, if you are determined enough to spend one to five years working on your scripted masterpiece, you should spend at least a couple of hours proofreading it for typographical errors. Or have your husband or wife do it. My girlfriend looks over all my stuff. Hell, I can't type either.

TAKE A SECOND LOOK

NOT A NOVEL IDEA

Truth: Screenplays are movies on paper. They are not novels. As such, they must be written differently.

Reality: You can't put a biography of your protagonist in your stage direction. The camera isn't going to convey what John McLane had for breakfast and why his wife dumped him. The audience will only know these tidbits if our characters say it out loud. Before you write a script, learn the differences between novels and screenplays. There are rules to follow. Start with the following: whatever the camera sees, you can write. If the camera can't see it, well, you have to exclude it.

Or come up with a funny psychic character (preferably not played by Whoopi Goldberg.)

