

TEN RULES FOR WRITING A SUCCESSFUL SHORT SCRIPT

by **Linda Cowgill**

1. Know who you're making your film for. If it's for yourself, that's who you have to satisfy. If you're making it as an entry into the industry, your film needs to work dramatically as well as technically. Competition is stiff.
2. The longer the story, the better the film has to be. Length comes down to what the story dictates. But if a film is over 15 minutes it really has to be great to keep people watching.
3. Write the script you can produce. Don't write a script with production values you can't effectively achieve.
4. The best ideas are simple. Focus on one main conflict, develop and explore it in surprising ways.
5. Set your film up in the first 60 seconds. If you're writing a ten-minute (10 page) movie, you can't take the first 5 pages to introduce your characters before getting to your conflict. Establish your conflict as soon as possible.
6. Make sure conflict escalates. Know what your character wants (the goal) and what's preventing him from getting it (the obstacle), and make sure your audience understands it, too.
7. Try to develop the conflict in one main incident as the set piece of your project. Many great short films develop the conflict in one incident to great effect, exploring character in ways feature films rarely do because they rely more heavily on plot.
8. If your film is less than 5 minutes, one type of conflict might be sufficient to satisfy your audience. But if your film is over 5 minutes, you're going to need to various obstacles or complications for your hero to face.
9. Just because your film is short doesn't mean you can't have an effective mid-point and reversal. Anything that keeps your audience from guessing your ending is an asset.
10. Make sure your ending is the best thing about your great film. Your payoff is what you're leaving the audience with and it's how they're going to remember you.

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TEN WAYS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR PLOT

by **Linda Cowgill**

1. Develop a clear conflict in the action of your story. Identify the forces of opposition.
2. Your protagonist is an emotional being. Know where your character stands emotionally at the start of the story so that s/he can be challenged emotionally early on. This helps in developing the character's arc.
3. Know what your protagonist wants, why s/he wants it, and what s/he needs. The more specific the character's want, the stronger the plot potential.
4. Examine the emotional consequences to the conflict your characters face. Determine which ones define your theme and engage the audience's emotions.
5. Remember: conflict doesn't come exclusively from the antagonist. Use other obstacles and complications to reveal character.
6. In dealing with the various problems (the conflicts), the hero must experience setbacks as well as successes to create tension. You define character as much through failure as through success. How the hero copes with these outcomes gives insight and meaning to character and story.
7. Characters are defined by the choices they make. Every story is really a series of increasingly difficult and dangerous choices that simultaneously carry your plot and illustrate your character.
8. Plots need to be based on action and reactions, cause and effect, to lead the audience from point to point. Use cause and effect plotting to make sure each scene leads believably to the next.
9. Conflict must escalate. All your characters have wants and needs, differing agendas, and these raise the level of conflict as your story progresses.
10. Audiences need surprise. The best surprises are the reversal and the reveal. Both must be plotted for. Reversals work best when the audience has been set up for one result and get the opposite. Reveals work best when the revelation has been cleverly foreshadowed early, but not given away.

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