

The following comes from Francis Glebas, Author of *Directing the Story*. An animator, director, and story artist at the Disney Feature Animation Studio, with dozens of film credits, including *Aladdin*, *The Lion King*, and *Fantasia 2000*.

Why is the story so hard to get right?

They don't call it *Development Hell* for nothing. Theme and story are the hardest part of making a movie. Time and money are often wasted trying to make the first act of a story perfect. Studios will tweak it over and over, only then having to change Act One again once the theme and story are worked out and after discovering that the beginning doesn't set up the ending properly.

(Theme and story progress from a central idea. They are not always immediately apparent, and can in fact shift -- or change altogether-- as the central idea is explored and fleshed out.)

A story only makes sense from one vantage point, the end. It's important to know where you're going and what it's really about. So, create your end goal first.

Piles of money can be wasted by the needs of a studio's production pipeline (In our case time is money). The pipeline determines the production flow, according to the budget and the schedule, sometimes requiring that a film star production before the story is ready. This is a disaster.

How does Pixar do story?

Pixar has several small teams of story artists and writers working on ideas, getting them ready to fly. When they are ready, these teams pitch the results. If the pitch goes well, then the story is developed further. They will keep pitching it, developing and pitching, showing it to progressively larger groups. Each time the character motivation gets refined, and the story gets tighter. Finally, after this looping process of development and feedback, they are ready to put it into the pipeline.

There are two things to note in their process. First, everyone contributes (any pitching or observing can submit notes). Second, they don't try to make it funny-- yet. They focus on making the story work.

Pixar understands well the problems the many problems that need to be solved-- they allow time and energy to the development process. And, they were not the first to employ this method. Walt Disney himself employed a similar system, as did the Marx Brothers.

The Marx Brothers tested their material over and over again, in front of live audiences until their jokes were polished. Only then did they commit the performance to film.

Once you have a basic story, theme, conflicts, and character arcs worked out, the story almost magically begins to write itself. But this happens only after a lot of research, exploration, development and experimentation.

A great place to begin.

Ask, what does your character want? Knowing what they want gets you halfway there. And, how does their story end? Everything between what they want, and how things end up is the story.

Connecting with an audience.

The importance of understanding the audience cannot be overstated. Movies that fail to connect to those that pay to sit in a darkened theater and watch the finished piece, are doomed.

Characters are memorable when they possess a unique style and personality. The audience needs to identify with your character so they can see themselves. Great storytelling invites the audience to live vicariously through the eyes of your character for a little while.