

## 1) Intention & Dostade

- Don't just write dialogue → think about intention & dostade
- Ex: leisure car ride across country w/ friends
  - ↳ Add intention: job interview, friend's wedding → has a deadline
  - ↳ Add obstacles: flat tires, lost, weather, ...
- Creates friction & tension
- Press on them → get audience on edge of their seat
  - If there are ways to get out easily, your dostade isn't formidable enough
  - Your hero doesn't have to win - they just need to try
- How to show intention & dostade?
  - You can state intention or both at the beginning
    - ↳ then continually introduce obstacles
- When to introduce?
  - TV: introduce ASAP
  - Movie: in between

## 2) Story Ideas

- An idea needs a "but then" ⇒ conflict
- No matter how shiny / interesting something is, it's not enough unless it has a conflict (Ex: Houdini - cool guy, but no conflict)
  - ↳ Conflict of equally strong ideas

- If you're attracted to a place → TV series (many seasons)
  - If your characters die/have no more story to tell → Feature
- You can start without an idea (like a blind date)
  - Genres, themes, topics, places you like
- Start with already broken plots
  - Practice dramatizing existing short stories whose plots have been broken

### 3) Rules of Story

- Best way to write: watch + read screenplays together
  - Choose your 5 favorite movies, and read their screenplays
- "Rules are what makes art/sports beautiful" (and not fingerpainting)
- Aristotle's Poetics is the rulebook
  - You can also absorb his rules by being a diagnostician
  - Figure out why something did / didn't work
- Many rules are wrong - only rules are rules of drama

### 4) Film Story Arc.

- Fact vs Story vs Drama
  - Fact: queen died
  - Story: queen died, then king died from broken heart
  - Drama: queen died, king lost intellectual power in her & now needs conflict must fight for throne
- 3 act structure
 

① Chase hero up a tree	② Throw rocks at them	③ Cut them down/ Die in tree
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- Must introduce tools to help hero early (in Act 1, not 3)
- Set **stakes** as high as possible
- **Exposition** is tricky
  - Need at least 1 character who knows as little as the audience
  - "As you know..." is BAD
- Then, lead into **inciting action**
- Use page numbers to track acts / pace
  - Voiceover & dialogue add to page #s
  - 1st 15 pages are most important

## 5) The Audience

- The audience isn't just watching, they're participating
- Treat your audience as intelligent
  - ↳ don't make up / throw unbelievable stuff
- Don't confuse them either

## 6) Writing Habits

- Usually, screenplays take him 18-24 months
  - Most is spent preparing to write (research, interviews, brainstorm, block)
  - Writing / typing = 3 months      **MOST DAYS YOU DON'T WRITE**  $\Rightarrow$  **NEED TO MENTALLY DEFEAT**
- Start with the 1st scene
- Use tools to organize writing (i.e. FinalDraft, index cards, corkboard)
- Write like yourself - don't lose your voice & style
- Writers' block is common
  - listen to music  $\Rightarrow$  need to feel good
  - celebrate progress

# WRITING MEMORABLE CHARACTERS & DIALOGUE

## 1) Developing Characters

- Character is born from intention & obstacle
  - ↳ what tactics does character use to overcome obstacle?
  - Mark Zuckerberg
    - Blog post ⇒ imagined the scene before blog post
    - goal: wants to be cool, socially accepted
    - tactic: Zuck created his own social world
    - many obstacles
- Do NOT write long biographies
  - Every detail should be connected to intention & obstacle
  - Character was never 5 years old - they're born when the movie starts (unless explicitly stated / flashback)
  - Little details distract from storyline, intention, & obstacle
- Write characters, not people
  - BAD goal: write char. ⇒ as human as possible
    - ↳ NO! That should be something inferred by audience
  - Could lead to overkill
- Writing characters unlike yourself is hard ⇒ helps to fill writers' room with diverse voices & backgrounds
- Identify with your anti-heroes
  - Do not judge them or hate them
  - You need to make your case for them, why they believe & do what they do

## 2) Writing Captivating Dialogue

- Dialogue = most personal aspect of writing
- Dialogue is **music**
  - Cadence, tone, volume, **rhythm** ⇒ constant back & forth
  - How it sounds is just as important as what is said
- Don't imitate real people
  - The only "real" dialogue flows from improvisation
- Don't make them sound like they're on TV
- Be physical when you're writing dialogue
  - Play all the parts yourself
  - He once broke his nose writing dialogue
  - Perform to test the scenes
    - ↳ Are these words **speakable**?
    - ↳ Did the jokes land? How does everything flow?

# CREATING MOMENTUM: WRITING SCENES

- Purpose of a scene
  - Move story forward
  - By the end of a scene, you must be
    - ≥ 1 step farther than where you were before
- How to go to next scene?
  - 1) Next scene = answer a question asked in previous scene
  - 2) Cut to something that counters an idea from prev. scene
  - 3) ... many options! End of 1 scene must → next scene.
- Reward patience
  - A scene must end with you wanting to keep going
  - "If you stick with us until the end, the wait will pay off"
- Incorporating comedy
  - There are specific comedic rules, e.g.:
    - Odd #s are funnier
    - Words with 'k' sounds
  - Do NOT use people's appearance as jokes
  - Best jokes are the ones you don't see coming
    - ↳ Set up early, reference much later
- Opening scenes
  - 1) Lay the theme
  - 2) Grab the audience

- { Begin in middle of conversations
  - Drop audience in fast paced situation
  - Crime scene → Title scene → Solve crime etc.

- Character introduction scenes
  - Set up intentions & obstacles
    - ↳ show the audience: what does character want?
    - ↳ do NOT: tell the audience facts about character
- Case study: scene from "Steve Jobs"
  - ↳ The scene is exciting b/c:
    - Conflict is clear → high stakes
    - Strong intention & obstacle
    - Revealed a lot about Steve & what he wants
    - Competing tactics b/t Steve & Andy
- Director visualizes ↔ Screenwriter hears

# PERFECTING THE DRAFT : RESEARCH & REWRITES

## 1) Research

- 2 kinds of research
  - Nuts & bolts
    - ↳ Factual, technical details
  - Find the movie
    - ↳ Talk with people to identify storyline, conflict, etc.
- Talk to as many people as you can
  - 1 hour usually suffices
    - ↳ Don't take too much of their time
    - ↳ Meet once usually, phone/email after
  - Gain their trust
  - Be direct : "Tell me something I don't know about..."
- Meaningless research ⇒ over-detail, minute details
  - Sometimes helpful for actors

## 2) Incorporating Research

- Research helps you think about the characters as humans
- Researching lines of dialogue
  - Make sure they're correct (even if you don't understand)
  - Technical, vocation-specific language
    - ↳ Shows "these ppl know what they're talking about" more than audience does
- In non-fiction, you have to decide :

What is the more important truth of the story?

### 3) Rewrites: First Draft

- Get to the end before you rewrite
  - Don't stop & rewrite, you'll never finish
- Chip away anything that isn't the main conflict
  - At the end, ask yourself : did this matter?
  - That's how you cut 400-500 pages down
  - It's hard to kill things you love, but you need to

### 4) Rewrites: Notes

- Find your editors (script editors AND civilians)
  - Make sure others are not trying to write your script for you
- Listen for the **problem**, not the solution
  - Others might not know how to fix, but you should not ignore their reactions → you hurt your shoulder, you tell doctor to do surgery. Doctor listens to your symptom (problem), but not your suggestion (solution)
- Sorkin likes to **retype his whole draft** at some point
  - "Hedge against laziness"

## LAST STEPS

### 1) Pitching a Screenplay

- Lay out intention, obstacle, conflict. Are they compelling?
- Who are your main characters?
- Is your story understandable? in < 60 secs ↑
- For TV: prepare pilot, but know what happens in next few eps.
- Be prepared to answer questions like "does — have a love interest?"

### 2) Closing Thoughts

- Get used to tuning out other voices (esp. social media)
  - Never change your story for someone else
  - It's impossible to make everyone happy
- Once you get your foot in the door, don't forget to go back to your love: to write the story you wanted to write
- You're not writing things to be read, you're writing things to be performed