

Script Hot House

A new development programme for writers

Application guidelines

What are we looking for?

We are looking for strong, distinctive stories.

We are looking for writers with something to say.

We are looking for feature films which are visually strong and imaginative.

Your story outline should show that you have:

- A dramatic story...
- ...with an ending! Many scripts start with a good set-up, but lack resolution.
- An engaging central character. Your characters don't have to be likeable, but they should be engaging. How do you make your protagonist engaging? It helps if they want or need something specific, whether concrete or metaphysical. We care about a character more if we see them actively in pursuit of their goal.
- And we will want them to succeed if their attempts are met with obstacles – either internal or external – which your main character must overcome.
- A compelling narrative. Ideally, we should feel the tension rise through the film so that we need to keep watching. Ask yourself: What happens if my character doesn't get what she/he wants? If not much happens, then the audience is less likely to care about them!

What is a story outline?

It's worth working through this simple and straightforward guide below to arrive at a coherent one-page story outline.

We give our thanks to Screen Australia for this extract of *What is a Synopsis? An Outline? A Treatment?* by Michael Brindley. Where the author says synopsis, we mean story outline. You should add to your synopsis the kind of film – or genre – you are writing: is it a comedy, a thriller, a film noir, a psychological drama?

Then think about how you'd pitch the story in a sentence and begin your outline with that sentence.

The generally accepted idea of a synopsis is a one page document. ('One page' really does mean one page. No one is fooled by attempts to squeeze more onto a page by using a compressed font in 10 point with no paragraph breaks.)

The synopsis gives us the starting event, implies further events and states the protagonist's predicament. It is useful in finding the essence of the story because it must state very briefly and simply WHO, WHAT and HOW: whose story it is (the protagonist), what his or her problem is, what they do about it and the outcome.

Then the one page synopsis (story outline) also establishes the other major characters and their lines of conflict, what is at stake for these characters, the setting in time and space, and the major turning points of the story.

The last is crucial; the key element of any synopsis is a clear indication of the story's structure. That is, how the story begins, develops and ends. The synopsis must reveal the end if only to convince readers that there is one and that it is a logical, dramatic outcome of all that comes before. Although the one page synopsis is a selling document, it is not a teaser. It should not end in three dots... It should tell the complete story, not simply posit a premise that leaves readers wondering 'what happens next'. Above all, what needs to be stimulated in the reader is not mere curiosity about 'how the story turns out', but an excitement about the possibility of this story as a movie.

To summarise

The one page synopsis (story outline) must include:

- *the event without which the story would not begin;*
- *the decisions and actions the characters make in pursuit of their goals;*
- *the obstacles and barriers they encounter and what they do about them;*
- *whether they win or lose;*
- *and where we leave them in the end.*

Despite its very compressed form, the synopsis does give the reader a sense of the characters because it includes their key choices and actions. And in a drama, choices and actions define character.