

SHORE SCRIPTS

THE BEGINNERS GUIDE TO REWRITING

There are many different ways to tackle a rewrite, and unfortunately, it's not something you can do just the once and think you're done. It's an ongoing process and there's no set number on how many passes a writer will need to do. Only **you** will know when your script feels done, at which point, you should probably get notes on it, then you'll either have to go back to the rewrites or, if you've put in the work, you can begin to send your script out to the industry.

Scripts get rewritten multiple times, and as with the actual process of screenwriting, there isn't a one-way-fits-all method. You may find there's a going to be lot of trial and error until you discover a process that works best for you, but this workbook is designed to give you a general means of self-editing your own work in bite-sized chunks, with the aim to make the process less overwhelming and enable you to make steady progress at the same time.

Work at your own pace and do what you can in the time that you have. This workbook is focused primarily on rewriting a feature script, working within the 3-act structure, but don't worry, there will be amendments for tv scripts in there too, should you need them.

Before you even begin to rewrite your script, you're going to do some preparation work by breaking down your first draft or existing script and reminding yourself of the important details that you intended your story to have when you first started. Obviously, things may have changed along the way, and things may very well continue to change, but having the essential details to hand will help pull focus once rewriting begins.

STEP 1: THE ESSENTIAL DETAILS

You've got a completed script, congratulations! You're one of the 20% of aspiring screenwriters who started to write and made it to the end. That already places you ahead of the 80% who didn't, but let's first just check whether that finished script is actually the story you set out to write in the first place, or whether it changed and went off in a completely different direction. Don't worry, it's perfectly normal if this has happened. We're just going to jot down some pivotal details in order to make sure everything still works.

Create a new word document, buy a new notepad, jot this down on a stickie note, or use whatever you'd normally use to create text documents. You're going to need to have this document to hand during the rewrite as it's going to be a vital point of reference.

Fill out the details below:

- **Movie Title:**
- **Logline:**
- **Genre:**
- **Page Count:**
- **Theme:**

If you can't fill in some of these details, don't worry, we'll cover them shortly, but quickly look over what you did write down in order to find any problems occurring even at this early stage.

- Does the **movie title** evoke the **genre**?
- Does the **movie title** reveal the premise?
- Is the **movie title** memorable?
- Does your story have enough **genre** conventions?
- What are you giving us in this story that we've never seen before?
- How commercial is your idea?
- What size of budget does your story need?
- Is the **page count** within the recommended limits?

If you've found areas that need addressed here, either stop and brainstorm a solution, or make a note, and come back to them at a later date.

STEP 2: THE LOGLINE

Why do you need to write out the logline again? Because we want to check if it's now different from the one you wrote down before you started writing your script. (if you didn't do this, you definitely should when tackling your next project!) There's every chance that something's changed and your old logline no longer fits, but if you stayed true to your original logline, now's also the time to make sure it's as compelling as it can be.

Your logline is essential for two very important reasons. It should indicate whether you've got an exciting concept that will intrigue producers AND it should explain exactly what happens in the **first act** of your script. This is why you need to have your logline to hand when we come to examining the structure.

Industry professionals will almost always decide to read your script based on the quality of your logline first, so if you don't get this element right, you could be limiting your chances, so what does a logline need?

There are several elements that make up a logline, so pick and choose which ones make your premise sound the most appealing, interesting, and original. Ultimately, your logline needs to leave the reader wanting to know more.

The 3 best elements to consider including are:

- **Who your story is about:** A rookie cop.../A psychologically damaged veteran.../An ambitious surgeon...
- **What's their goal:** ...must stop a serial killer/...is determined to gain custody of her son/...must save Christmas
- **What's standing in their way:** ...must overcome his short-term memory problems/... must save her family from a serial killer/...must battle a tyrannical ruler

Optional extras that can be used to enhance a logline are:

- **The Inciting Incident:** After wrongly being convicted of murder...
- **Setup:** In a near-future where humans are no longer fertile....
- **What's at stake:** ...or risks losing the love of his life.
- **What's their character flaw/weakness/limitation:** An acrophobic pilot....
- **Allies:** ...teams up with his mad scientist best friend to...
- **Inner Battle:** ...must overcome his own prejudices to...

Write out several different versions, pick the best, and add it to the other essential details.

STEP 3: THEME

This can be a tricky element to pin down and it's often forgotten about and swept under the carpet because of this, but it's extremely important, especially when it comes to tying all of the scenes and subplots together. If you're writing a tv series, you can have both an overarching series theme as well as an episodic theme, which changes each episode, and yes, it's possible to have multiple themes in a screenplay, but be wary, too many big themes, especially ones that clash, can make your script cluttered, confusing, and lack focus.

Some writers like to know what the theme is before they start, others let the theme become apparent during the rewriting process, so there's no right or wrong here.

The theme is different to the premise. What you're trying to determine is the big issue, question, or moral at the core of the story itself. To make things easier, consider whether you're trying to convey a message, such as 'with great power comes great responsibility', or are you posing a question to the audience, such as 'how far can you push a man before he breaks?'

Knowing what the overarching theme of your story is, is something you'll need to constantly keep in mind during the rewriting process, so in order to work out what your theme is, here's a few questions to ask yourself:

- **What made you want to write this particular story?**
- **What emotional response do you want the audience to have when watching?**
- **What lesson (if any) does your MC learn during their journey?**
- **What is the outcome of the story? Is it positive or negative?**
- **What injustices do your characters face?**

STEP 4: CHARACTER CHECK LIST

Either in the same document, or in a new one, you're now going to make a list of key pieces of information about your story. Again, have this to hand throughout the rewriting process, you're going to be referring back to it. A LOT.

- **Protagonist's Name:**
- **Central Flaw/Weakness/Limitation:**
- **Goal:**
- **Motivation:**
- **Stakes:**
- **Emotional Need:**
- **What action are they doing when we first see them on screen:**
- **What's standing in the way of them achieving their goal:**

- **Antagonist's Name:**
- **Central Flaw/Weakness/Limitation:**
- **Goal:**
- **Motivation:**
- **Stakes:**
- **Emotional Need:**
- **What action are they doing when we first see them on screen:**
- **What's standing in the way of them achieving their goal:**

You can repeat the above process for any of your secondary characters if you want to make sure that they're playing pivotal roles or if they're central to a subplot.

If there isn't an antagonistic character in your story, you can still apply the principle to whatever the antagonistic force is. Although you won't necessarily be able to determine the emotional need of a natural disaster or a crippling disease, etc, pinpointing a weakness that your protagonist can use when battling against the 'antagonistic force' or any obstacles that may prevent the overall goal of that 'antagonistic force' can be very useful here.

STEP 5: THE BEAT SHEET REWRITE

Next, you're going to write out a new beat sheet (without re-reading your screenplay!)

Off the top of your head, jot down the major story beats and turning points throughout your story. Use the following as a guide. It's a mish-mash of already established and well-known beats, but don't be surprised if there are ones that didn't occur in your story. Simply bypass them if they're not there, but also seriously consider whether adding in that additional beat could help your overall script too.

If you can't recall some of the pivotal moments in your story, make a note of them. If they're not memorable enough for you, the writer, to remember them right now, then they're also probably going to be forgettable moments for the audience too, so they very likely need some attention.

- **Opening Image:** What visual do you use to grab the audience straight away?
- **Hook:** This isn't the same as the inciting incident, but something needs to occur in the first few pages (ideally, the first!) that grabs the reader and leaves them wanting more.
- **Theme Stated:** Often stated by a minor character, a visual, or during a conversation where one character is pro-theme, and the other is anti-theme.
- **Setup:** This is introducing the MC's 'normal world'. It establishes the rules of the world, the tone, and reveals character flaws or weaknesses.
- **Inciting Incident:** What happens to disrupt the MC's 'normal world' and forces them into a new one?
- **Refusal of the Call:** Your MC doesn't like change, they're resistant to it. Here's where you show how unwilling they are to take up whatever difficult challenge lies ahead.
- **Debate:** Through debate, the MC accepts the call to action, and start to make preparations and plans.
- **Turning Point 1:** The Break into Act 2 is where something happens to pivot the MC's plans 180 degrees and takes it into a new direction.
- **Focal Point 1:** The B-story subplot. A minor failure occurs, but the MC can still walk away if they want to.
- **Fun & Games:** The MC reacts in the same old manner to new complications, so usually fails.
- **Midpoint:** This is the point of no Return for the MC. They no longer have the option of turning back.
- **Bad Guys Close In:** Rising stakes, more obstacles, bigger problems.
- **Focal Point 2:** B-story progression. The MC is learning/growing/getting stronger.
- **Rock Bottom:** A huge failure occurs. We can't see the MC winning from here.
- **Dark Night of the Soul:** A new hope arises, moral support, more resolve to carry on.
- **Turning Point 2:** Break into Act 3. A major setback or moment of truth.
- **Final Battle:** Win or lose everything here.
- **Resolution:** The problem is solved.
- **End Twist:** The greatest obstacle of all.

- **Closing Image:** This should be a mirror image of your opening image in some manner that shows progression or change.

Why are we plotting out these points again? Some of these points may be missing or feel weak in your first draft, so you're going to need this point of reference when it comes to analysing your script.

If you're writing a TV pilot, and depending on the act structure you've used and the length, you're probably not going to have all of these beats occurring within an episode. In this case, take each of your story threads; The A-Story, B-Story, and C-Story etc, and pick out these key beats:

- **Hook:** This can also be the teaser, but something needs to happen very early on to make the reader want to keep turning the page.
- **Setup:** Introduce the main and secondary characters in their 'normal world'
- **Inciting Incident:** What happens to kick off the episode premise.
- **Turning Point 1:** The Break into Act 2 needs a big hook to keep the viewers engaged.
- **Midpoint:** This can either be a success or failure moment for the MC, but the stakes are raised, there's a big reveal, or a twist takes the plot into a new direction.
- **Turning Point 2:** Yet another reveal, clue, or big question gets answered allowing the MC to forge ahead to the climax.
- **Climax:** All plot threads converge on this moment to conclude the episode or a all events have led to this point, which create new openings for future episodes.
- **Tag:** A final hint as to what else is to come, with a hook that ensures viewers will return.

That's the preparation over. Next, you're going to make sure that all of that pivotal info is actually coming across in your story.

STEP 6: CREATE SEQUENCES

In order to make the rewrite a little more manageable, you're going to divide your story up into 4 acts (Act 1, Act 2A, Act 2B, and Act 3), and then further divide them in half in order to create roughly 8-sequences. This will enable you to tackle one at a time, as well as reorder them more easily if needed.

If this is a tv series, break the list down into whatever structure you were originally writing to. Teaser, Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, Act 4, Act 5 or Teaser, Act 1, Act 2, Tag or Cold Open, Act1, Act2, Act 3 etc.

You can either copy and paste your script into a new document one sequence at a time, or colour code your script into easily distinguishable sections by using a new font or highlight colour. It may also be helpful to create a new word document at this stage and use broad strokes to describe the content of each sequence and scene as such, giving each act and sequence a descriptive title that reminds you of what's happening followed by a brief description of all the scenes contained within: -

ACT 1: Dean discovers his wife is having an affair and decides to confront her

SEQUENCE 1: Dean thinks his wife is having an affair

Scene: Introducing DEAN

Scene: Dean discovers suspect images on wife's computer

Scene: Travelling on motorway

Scene:

ACT 1: Dean discovers his wife is having an affair and decides to confront her

SEQUENCE 2: The son he never knew existed turns up on his doorstep

Scene:

Scene:

Scene:

Scene:

ACT 2A: Dean tries to keep his son's identity a secret

SEQUENCE 3: _____

Scene:

Scene:

Scene:

Scene:

Think of this in terms of hooks. Ideally, you want a new hook happening every 10-12 pages in your script to keep the audience engaged. If you're having difficulty doing this, there could be pacing issues happening in your script. Some genres have a faster pace than others, but the dramatic momentum still needs to be forging forward.

STEP 7: GIVE EACH SEQUENCE A PURPOSE

Time to examine each sequence (or act, if you're writing a TV script) a little deeper.

For each sequence, figure out what **GOAL** needed to be achieved, what **ACTION** took place to achieve it, and what **COMPLICATION** occurred along the way. You may feel like you're writing the same descriptions over and over here, but it's going to pay off in the long run.

ACT 1: Dean discovers his wife is having an affair and decides to confront her

SEQUENCE 1: Dean thinks his wife is having an affair

GOAL: Dean is planning a romantic anniversary gift for his wife

ACTION: Dean accesses his wife's computer in order to arrange the surprise gift

COMPLICATION: He finds photos that suggest she's having an affair

Check the scenes listed underneath each sequence. Do they all work to portray the **GOAL > ACTION > COMPLICATION** outlined for each sequence?

Don't worry if you've got subplot scenes in between, but if there's anything that might be interrupting the purpose of each sequence, such as a reveal that comes too late or too early, too many scenes focusing on secondary characters, or scenes that don't move the story forward, try to figure out if these scenes need to be moved elsewhere, be rewritten, or cut.

Some questions to keep asking yourself along the way, no matter what stage of rewriting you're at:

- **Is this interesting enough?**
- **Is the story predictable at any point?**
- **Is the info I'm trying to deliver clear enough?**
- **Is my writing engaging to read?**

STEP 8: SEQUENCE 1 REWRITE

This is the most important sequence in your script, so let's double check that your opening sequence is fulfilling all of the necessary requirements to make it as compelling as possible. Here's some essential elements that should be happening:

- Opening image.
- Meet the MC (in the first scene, unless there's a hook/teaser/time-jump being used).
- See them in their 'normal world'.
- Establish the MC's flaw.
- Inciting incident – this can happen earlier than at the end of this sequence. In fact, the earlier the better.
- Establish the theme.

That's a lot for to be happening in such a short amount of script, but the quicker you can jump into the story, the better. More and more often, there's less setup/backstory/or establishing the 'normal world' occurring in scripts, but do what's best for your story.

If you've got all these points happening refer back to your essential info.

- **Is the genre clear from p1?**
- **What tone are you setting? Have you set it strong enough?**
- **Is there a line of dialogue that states the theme?**
- **What does the audience learn about your MC from the action they're doing when we first meet them?**
- **What emotional need does your MC not realise they need fulfilled?**
- **What great hook do you have on p1?**

STEP 9: SEQUENCE 2 REWRITE

This is where the premise absolutely needs to be clearly established (if you didn't already do so in sequence 1 that is!), so check your logline. Whatever you promised there, needs to be delivered here. A predicament needs to have been instigated by the inciting incident, and the MC must make the decision to tackle the problem, but that doesn't always need to be an easy decision. This sequence should have the following elements occurring:

- Big problem established (the promise of the premise)
- Establish the stakes.
- Refusal of the call.
- Decision to press forward (the call to adventure).
- Turning point 1 – A new complication pivots the MC into a new direction.

Again, check the essentials.

- **Are the stakes high enough for the audience to care?**
- **Is the MC's goal clear?**
- **Will the audience understand what's motivating the MC?**
- **What emotions are you trying to elicit in the viewers, and will your writing do this?**
- **When is the best point to introduce the antagonist?**

STEP 10: SEQUENCE 3 REWRITE

Remember those stakes you established? Now's the time to raise them as well as introduce the first obstacle in your MC's path. You can also introduce subplots here if you haven't already. Look back at the **GOAL > ACTION > COMPLICATION** you wrote down for this sequence to make sure each of your scenes are working effectively, but here are some other elements to include too:

- MC attempts to solve the problem.
- The MC tries to succeed using old behaviours, which fail (the flaw)
- Add another conflict to raise the stakes.
- Additional exposition (so it's not all crammed into the first act)

Keep referring back to the essentials as well as those key questions:

- **Do subplots reflect theme too?**
- **Why should the audience still care about your characters?**
- **Does the antagonist also have clear motivations?**
- **Has the MC's goal changed or is it the same?**
- **How is the antagonist outsmarting the MC?**

STEP 11: SEQUENCE 4 REWRITE

There's a continuation of what's often referred to as the 'fun and games' where you fulfil the expectations that your premise promised. Genre conventions play a big part in what viewers will be looking for, but don't forget to add originality, your own spin, and new surprises to those expectations too. This sequence should contain some of the following elements:

- The MC becomes more active.
- The MC realises they need to change in order to succeed.
- A plan is hatched.
- There's a moment of no return (the MC has no choice but to forge forward).

The midpoint is a huge story beat to hit hard, so ask yourself:

- **What occurred to ensure that your MC can no longer turn back and give up the quest?**
- **Is your writing evoking strong emotional reactions in the reader/audience?**
- **Is the level of conflict rising?**
- **How many "what happens next?" moments are you creating in your scenes?**
- **Was there a false victory or false fail that raised the stakes?**

STEP 12: SEQUENCE 5 REWRITE

It's not uncommon for writers to struggle after midpoint as the story begins to run out of steam, but this is precisely the time to amp it up a gear. Your MC is probably reacting to new situations in an old way, so now's a good time to instigate some change. Some things to consider inserting into this sequence are:

- Rising action/dramatic momentum (things are getting more exciting).
- More subplot content.
- The antagonist is making it harder for the MC.
- The MC reaches their lowest ebb.

More questions to keep asking as you move forward:

- **Have you reminded the viewers of the consequences should the MC fail?**
- **How is your MC's flaw/weakness/limitation working against them?**
- **Is the MC being active enough? (are they the ones making the decisions?)**
- **Is there a moment when the MC considers giving up?**
- **How can you make it even worse for your MC here?**

STEP 13: SEQUENCE 6 REWRITE

Things are about to come to ahead here, where the MC faces an impossible obstacle/ decision, and the stakes continue to be raised. There should be an increase of tension here, no matter what genre you're writing, so double check that the **GOAL > ACTION > COMPLICATION** you envisaged for this sequence reflects this. Other elements to throw in include:

- A big defeat for the MC.
- A moment of transformation for the MC.
- Moral support from a secondary character.
- Turning Point 2 - All is lost (it's hard to see the MC winning now).

What you should be asking now:

- **How did you visually show growth in your MC?**
- **Which secondary character gives your MC enough encouragement to continue and why?**
- **How is theme reflected in the scene where the MC is defeated?**
- **Are you letting the visuals deliver exposition as much as possible?**
- **Do you need to remind the viewers of what's at stake?**

STEP 14: SEQUENCE 7 REWRITE

There's often a new goal or new need established for the MC here. It's often the moment that the MC realises what they wanted, they didn't really need, but what they needed, they had all along. But there's still a lot of time left in the script, so don't think that you can start winding down the conflict just yet. Some elements to consider including are:

- A big plot twist or reveal that creates a new goal for the MC.
- All subplots merge with the central thread here.
- The final battle.
- The MC learns the lesson.

Still keep asking if you're doing enough:

- **Is the final battle the hardest obstacle to overcome in the story?**
- **Could you turn the MC's weakness into a strength to win the final battle?**
- **Did the MC defeat the antagonist rather than a secondary character?**
- **Which elements from your subplots helped during the final battle?**

STEP 15: SEQUENCE 8 REWRITE

This is the only point in your script where there's a decline in dramatic momentum, but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be interesting. A memorable ending to a movie can save a weak beginning (not that you should have a weak ending!) so keep in mind how you want the audience to feel when they leave the theatre after watching your movie. Some last remaining elements to include can be:

- Closing image (should ideally be an opposing mirror to the opening image).
- All story threads are concluded.
- The question posed in sequence 1 is answered here.

Final questions to ask yourself:

- **Does the closing image reflect the change in your MC?**
- **Does the last scene give closure or does it leave a cliff-hanger?**
- **Did the MC do enough to earn the reward at the end?**
- **Is the ending satisfying?**

STEP 16: SCENE ANALYSIS

Delving a little deeper, let's look at individual scenes. Just as each sequence needed a **GOAL** > **ACTION** > **COMPLICATION**, so does every scene. If a scene isn't fulfilling a purpose, such as moving the plot forward, showing character, or delivering pivotal exposition, it's wasting space on the page and is a potential cut if amendments aren't made.

But how can you tell if a scene is being effective or not? Use this checklist to determine whether anything needs to be improved or removed.

- **Give at least one NEW piece of key information.**
- **A scene needs a goal. What is the MC trying to achieve or prevent?**
- **Have your MC make a decision? The harder, the better.**
- **A scene needs to contain some level of conflict or have something at stake.**
- **Is the central theme being expressed?**
- **Include a prompt, new question, clue, reveal, or twist that moves the plot forward.**
- **What visual action is taking place on screen to interest us?**
- **There should be a change or reversal of values from the start of the scene to the end of a scene. Negative to positive or vice versa.**

STEP 17: SETUPS AND PAYOFFS

Now that you have a fairly comprehensive scene list, now is a good time to mark off all of the setups and payoffs that you included along the way. Why do you need these? First off, audiences (and readers) love payoffs. It's like a mini reward for having paid attention, secondly, if you have setups that don't get paid off, you've possibly got pointless information filling up precious space in your script, and if you have payoffs that weren't properly setup, your payoffs will come across as being very convenient, unbelievable, or ridiculous, which are all reactions you probably want to avoid giving the audience.

Whether you do this using your scene list or via a copy of your screenplay, you're going to highlight all of the setups and payoffs in your script, as well as find opportunities for new ones. This means looking for any significant lines of dialogue, props, audio cues, or actions that could be revisited or reused later on in the story.

While doing this, also look for more potential setups and payoffs. Was there an item used in sequence one that could come back into play during sequence 7? Or was something said in sequence 6 that came out of nowhere and needed to be set up in an earlier one etc? The more setups and payoffs the better, so don't scrimp on inserting them into your script.

STEP 18: CHARACTER REWRITE

Story is nothing without character, and you can have the most exciting, dramatic plot in the world, but if the audience don't care about your characters, especially the MC, then they're not going to be emotionally invested.

If you're confident that you have a solid structure to your script, let's look at ensuring that you've got compelling characters that the audience will want to watch. (You should also refer to the **MAKE AUDIENCES CARE ABOUT YOUR CHARACTERS** workbook for a more in depth look at this too)

Work through this list of considerations. These are all aimed towards the MC, but you can apply them to any other character too.

- **Did you use an essence statement to describe the MC, telling us something about their personality when introducing them?**
- **Is the first person we meet the MC? If not, have you made sure that the reader won't automatically assume they're the protagonist?**
- **Is the MC doing something interesting when we first meet them? What does it tell us about them?**
- **Did you visually show us the MC's flaw/weakness/limitation?**
- **Does your MC feature in every story beat and turning point?**
- **What memorable traits does your MC have and are they being expressed enough?**
- **How do you want the audience to feel about your MC? Are you doing enough to evoke that emotion?**
- **Will swapping genders add a new twist or help make your MC more unique?**
- **Is your MC's flaw ideal for causing problems along the way?**
- **What does your MC fear most?**
- **Who is the least likely character to help your MC at a pivotal moment?**
- **What does your MC add to the genre?**
- **Do all other characters play useful roles that either help or hinder your MC?**
- **Is your MC being active? Do they make difficult decisions and take action in order to move the story forward?**

STEP 19: READABILITY

The first hurdle any script needs to overcome is getting past the reader, but it's often completely forgotten about by the writer. Readers have read hundreds, if not thousands of scripts, and while that doesn't necessarily mean that they've seen it all before, it does mean that they are desperate to find an engaging, entertaining, and memorable script. What ruins that chance is if a script is improperly formatted, is text heavy, has a confusing plot, and boring scene description. Readers are professionals and they expect screenplays to be professional too.

(Reading both the **COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO FORMATTING** guide and the **POLISH YOUR SCREENPLAY** course is also advised for further learning)

We're going back to scene analysis here. Understanding what needs to be included in a scene in order for it to be effective only works if you also understand what DOESN'T need to be included. This is probably by far the biggest mistake that occurs in a first draft. It's easy to get carried away and put absolutely everything down on the page. The fun part is trimming off the unnecessary fluff that's hampering both the story and the read.

Again, as a reminder, if something isn't moving the story forward, revealing character, or delivering pivotal information, it's a potential cut. Here's a guide to what you very likely don't need to have in a scene:

- **Repetition.** This doesn't just include repeating information we already know; it includes stating the obvious, or using the same words in your description over and over, that doesn't do much to showcase your creative writing skills.
- **Too many characters.** Cramming lots of names into a scene for the reader to remember risks causing confusion. If minor characters aren't pivotal to the scene, don't mention them, or at least try to be general.
- **Over description.** Less is more. We don't need to know every single movement a character makes or every item in the room to understand the context. Use evocative but sparing description to set the scene, tone, and genre.
- **'Unfilmables'.** If we can't see it on the screen, it doesn't need to be in the description. This includes telling a character's thoughts, backstory, or character relationships.
- **Long Sluglines.** Anything that's making the reader take longer to read your script should be avoided, and limiting lengthy scene headings, which, let's face it, aren't exactly riveting to read, is one way to do this.

STEP 20: DIALOGUE REWRITE

Dialogue has been left last on the list, as many of the recommendations that were given about improving the readability of a script apply here too, so hopefully you'll already have a good understanding of what needs to be done – cutting everything back to the bone.

(Also check out the [WHY DIALOGUE IS KILLING YOUR SCRIPT](#) workbook for a more in depth look at this too)

Here's a short guide of things to check when rewriting dialogue. You can do a separate pass for each one, or take a single sequence or scene and go through the entire list – whatever works best for you.

- **Enter late and leave early:** Get rid of greetings and goodbyes, cut the waffle and jump straight into the gripping dialogue and end on the most powerful line in the scene.
- **Show, don't tell:** If you can get the point across by using a visual or action instead of someone telling us via dialogue, it usually creates a stronger impact.
- **Cut the chit-chat:** All the fluff that makes dialogue sound natural could also be getting in the way of the story, slowing the place, and making your script take longer to read. Um's, oh's, and conversational pleasantries are all potential cuts.
- **Use subtext:** People rarely blurt out exactly what they're thinking or feeling. In fact, most of the time, they skirt about a subject and say anything but those things, so add as much subtext as you can to make dialogue much more engaging.
- **Do a harsh cut:** Early drafts almost always have far too much dialogue. Now it's time to remove absolutely everything that isn't moving the plot forward, is revealing character, or is delivering pivotal exposition. If we don't need to know it, you don't need it in your script. Now's also a good time to get rid of any repetition that's taking up precious space on the page too.
- **Speech needs to be realistic:** Not only do voices need to stand out from one another, they need to be believable. There's a hard balance to obtain here, too realistic and there's going to be too much filler-dialogue that slows the pace, too unrealistic, and the viewers won't connect to your characters. Do your research, character development, and ensure that speech is appropriate to the time, location, and personality of each character.

CONCLUSION

As you can see, there are a lot of different elements to tackle, lots of different passes to be done, and it can definitely feel like a never-ending process. This is just one of several ways to look at rewrites, but hopefully you've been able to gain something from it, whether that's how to break your script into more manageable chunks or a broader understanding on what types of passes that can be done.

Some writers love rewriting, others hate it. Regardless, it's easy to get overwhelmed, so setting yourself small achievable goals is a great way to begin, either by act, sequence, or scene – or by structure, character, dialogue etc. “Writing is rewriting” as they say, so go forth and keep chipping away at your masterpiece!