

SHORE SCRIPTS

HOW TO HANDLE FEEDBACK

INTRODUCTION

Getting feedback on your screenplay is an integral part of being a screenwriter. It can be stressful, intimidating, and downright scary – after all, you’ve put yourself down on the page. You’ve put blood, sweat, and tears into writing your story. Now you’ve got to put yourself into the vulnerable position of being open to criticism - but the fact is, if no one reads your script, it’s got zero chance of being made. Filmmaking is a collaborative process and being a writer is but one small (but extremely important) part of a much bigger enterprise.

No one writes a fantastic million-dollar selling screenplay on their first attempt. No one. Even the best in the business will have their screenplays scrutinized, assessed, and commented on and you’d better believe that everyone will have their own opinion on what works and what doesn’t. But how do you figure out what feedback is worth listening to? How do you deal with both negative and positive comments? When should you consider letting other people read your script? And where do you find ready and willing readers?

Don’t worry. We’ll answer all of these questions and more. Let’s go!

WHY GET FEEDBACK?

We’ve already mentioned that there’s really no avoiding having someone else read your screenplay if you want to break in. Regardless of whether you’re entering screenwriting contests, querying agents & managers, pitching directly to studios, or trying to finance, produce, and shoot, your own stuff, your script will have to be read by the people who have the power to help take you and your script further.

It can be very hard to look at your own work objectively. Especially if you’ve been working on a project for a long time and are perhaps too close to it. Getting a fresh pair of eyes on your work can be extremely valuable. Someone reading your script for the very first time doesn’t intimately know the characters, story world, or plot, like you do, so if something’s not clear or there’s missing info that explains things better, they’re going to be able to pick up on that.

Depending on who is reading your script (we'll get into that later), a reader is also going to be able to tell you whether they were able to connect to your characters, if there were any lulls in the plot where they began to lose interest, when they were caught off guard and surprised by the plot, what made the script an enjoyable read and what didn't.

Even if you write for your own creative enjoyment and have no interest in getting your script produced, there's only so much improvement you can make on your own without help.

To summarize, here are the benefits of why getting feedback is extremely important:

- To give validation on your ideas
- To get fresh objective eyes on your work
- To get used to the collaborative nature of the business
- To learn how to handle criticism
- To receive professional advice on how to improve your script
- To get your screenplay industry-ready.

WHEN TO GET FEEDBACK?

Arguably, you should be getting feedback from the very beginning, even before you put pen to paper. Testing a concept before committing to writing the script can save valuable time and effort. There's nothing worse than spending months or even years working on a project only to discover there's no market for it. And yes, your idea needs to be marketable. Save the passion project for after you've broken in and you made it. Until then, you need to be writing material that other people will want to watch.

Getting feedback on your logline(s) is just as important as getting feedback on your latest draft. Check out the [Testing Your Concept](#) Workbook for more details and tips on this.

In regards to when you should seek feedback on your actual script, ideally, only do this once you've written the script in its entirety. Getting feedback during the first draft would be more akin to collaboration, which is a great way to bounce ideas back and forth and have someone to brainstorm the finer details when trying to flesh out the plot, but if you're not planning to collaborate and are working solo, getting feedback while still developing the concept may not be terribly effective.

"I finished writing my first draft. Should I pay for coverage?"

No. Please don't! Any first draft is going to be terrible, regardless of how developed the outline was, and paying good money to have a professional look over a script in this condition isn't going to help anyone. If you have peers willing to give the script a read in order to give a few pointers, by all means go for it, but to get the most value out of paid coverage, you need to get your script into the best shape possible first by yourself – and this means rewrites!

Go through [The Beginners Guide to Rewriting](#), [Why Dialogue is Killing Your Script](#), and [Adding Subtext to Your Script](#) workbooks before seeking professional feedback. In the long run, it's going to be more valuable to learn more about the craft through practice. Rewrites don't go away the more experienced you become, but they do become easier.

When sending your screenplay out into the industry, even to get helpful feedback, it needs to be a final draft, but sometimes it's not always possible to wait until you've polished your script. Looming submission deadlines from agents, contests, or fellowships may force the necessity for feedback much sooner, in which case, absolutely seek coverage. Getting a professional eye on your work will help you make the necessary amendments to ensure that your script has the best chance to make a positive impression.

Always consider who you're submitting your screenplay to. An agent only wants to see a script that's industry-ready and is as close to being greenlit as possible, whereas a manager is more likely to appreciate a work in progress and is willing to help develop the piece with you. Similarly, studios, production companies, and contests want to see your best work, meaning that a loose or undeveloped idea fleshed into a first draft won't cut it. And while many competitions offer feedback to contest entries (usually for an additional fee), make sure that you'll have the time to make any changes and to re-submit before the final deadline!

Lastly, you need to be open to criticism too. There's no point receiving coverage if you're not ready to hear anything negative about your work. Accept that there's no such thing as a perfect screenplay, that people will have different opinions to you, and that there are others out there who have much more knowledge of the business than yourself. Getting feedback is a learning experience, regardless of whether it's a positive or negative one, and you need to be open to that.

To recap, seek feedback:

- When testing out a new idea before committing to writing it
- When you've taken the script as far as you can yourself
- Before you submit your script to a professional body, such as a contest, agent, or studio
- When you're willing to receive constructive criticism

WHERE TO FIND FEEDBACK?

The short answer is EVERYWHERE, but realistically, feedback falls into two categories: Professional and Unprofessional. Both are valuable, but for very different reasons.

UNPROFESSIONAL FEEDBACK:

In blunt terms, this means FREE feedback and it's a great idea to exhaust every means of getting this first.

- Friends
- Family
- Work colleagues
- Educators aka teachers, mentors, lecturers
- Peers aka other aspiring screenwriters, producers, directors
- Online community's aka Facebook groups, Reddit groups, writer's groups

The more eyes you can get on your work, the better, but be aware that there are going to be **limitations** to the quality of the feedback when asking those who aren't terribly screenplay-savvy to read your work. Your family and friends will probably tell you that your scripts brilliant because they support you no matter what, but unless they understand screenplay format, story structure, and the film market, you'll have to take their feedback with a pinch of salt.

Here's some tips on how to get the most out of this type of feedback: -

1. Be respectful

Reading a feature script can take 2-5hrs. That can be a big ask for anyone with limited free time, so be grateful for anyone willing to lend that time to you if you want to retain that person as a continued reader. Even if the feedback you receive isn't quite to your liking, be appreciative that your script was (hopefully) read the whole way through and try to take the positives as much as possible.

2. Give a Remit

In order to focus the comments coming from someone who may not understand story structure or character development, etc, create a remit. 'What parts of the story excited you the most?', 'Are the characters relatable, realistic, believable, root-able?', or 'Is there anything that didn't make sense?' are all viable remits to give. Try to guide the reader to pay attention to the areas that you yourself feel need more work in order to get the most out of the feedback.

3. Give back

Getting feedback from your peers often comes with the assumption that you'll need to be prepared to give feedback in return. Don't let this put you off! Reading more spec scripts and analyzing what works, what doesn't, and more importantly *why*, you're going to be able to better assess any future feedback you receive and it's going to improve your own writing. It's well worth joining or creating a group of fellow peers with whom you can write and receive feedback with regularly in order to develop a support system and to find readers whose opinion you respect.

4. Recognize the Reader

When receiving notes from non-screenwriting parties or other writers, there can be a tendency for feedback to contain comments on how they would write your story differently. While this could help spark new and unexpected ideas during early drafts, do remember that it's *your* story. Learn to recognize whether notes like that will improve your story or turn it into someone else's.

PROFESSIONAL FEEDBACK:

This doesn't necessarily always mean PAID feedback, but you'll probably have to be at an advanced stage of your career to receive feedback from studios and production companies.

Now, there's a difference between receiving notes and receiving feedback here. Notes are what a writer receives from production companies, agents, managers, producers, development execs, and anyone higher up in the chain. If you're at the stage where you're receiving notes, you pretty much have to adhere to the demands written within as you'll be under contract. Feedback, on the other hand, can come from anywhere else and you're under no obligation to take any action on those notes at all. The most common places to find professional feedback is from:

- Coverage services
- Screenplay Contests
- Agents & Managers
- Production Companies

You will need to understand what exactly you're looking for from feedback. Script Readers, Script Doctors, Script Consultants, and Script Editors all offer different kinds of feedback, so know what stage your script is at and which service best suits your needs.

Here are some tips on how to get the most out of professional feedback:

1. Do your research

Higher fees don't necessarily mean higher quality. Check credentials and reviews to make sure the company or individual whose taking your money is genuine and has the experience needed for the job. Coverage services will usually have samples of the types of coverage they offer, so look those over in preparation. A faster turnover doesn't always mean better coverage either. Weigh up how much time you'd like a reader to spend on your script over how quickly you need those notes.

2. Ensure your script is polished

We've already touched on this, but let's expand on it. If you're completely new to screenwriting and are still finding your feet, try to get as much free feedback as you can before submitting to professionals. A reader wants to help develop a story, its characters, its tone, and structure, but if the majority of a coverage report is filled with comments about how the basic formatting, layout, and proofreading have been done poorly – all of which a writer could easily have taken the time to learn on their own – then that feels a little like a wasted opportunity. There are no quick shortcuts in screenwriting.

3. Be prepared for lots of info

Regardless of the level of coverage you've purchased, a reader is going to cover all of the important aspects of your story – in broad strokes – and are most likely going to cover lots of aspects that you haven't considered yet. Coverage can be overwhelming at first, but don't feel that you need to tackle every recommendation at once (if at all). Trust your gut. A lot of the times, a writer already instinctively knows what's wrong with their story and coverage simply reaffirms this. Take the time to go over feedback with a fine-toothed comb and take your own notes. Which comments do you feel will improve your story and which won't?

4. Leave your ego at the door

Have an open mind when reading feedback. Sure, we all want a glowing report from the reader and it can be discouraging when reality hits. After spending so much time on a piece of work, a reluctance to change anything is completely understandable. They say a screenplay is never truly finished until the film has been released. Accept that changes are part of the course. Receiving coverage is a learning process too. If you've done your homework and trust the reader knows what they're talking about, take their knowledge and make it your own.

5. Ask follow up questions

Not every coverage service offers this, but if they do, it's worth considering gaining even more insight into a reader's thoughts. Reports are often limited to a certain page count and not every single thing that a reader has to say ends up on the paper. Reader's need to stick to the broad strokes to ensure that the important points are made, but if there's something that you need clarification on or to be expanded upon, ask!

WHAT IS COVERAGE?

Professional Feedback comes in the form of a coverage report. These can come in all shapes and sizes as there's no universal layout, but to give you an indication of what one looks like, here's our own coverage report:

SHORE SCRIPTS

SHORE SCRIPTS COVERAGE REPORT

Title: Example Title **Location:** Place/Setting
Writers: Example Name **Circa:** Time Period
Length: XX Pages **Budget:** Low/Medium/High
Genre: Drama, Sci-Fi, etc. **Coverage Date:** MM/DD/YYYY

Format: Short/Web Series/TV Pilot (1-Hour or ½-Hour)/Feature/Podcast

Logline:
Sentence case.....

Industry Scorecard:

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	PROFICIENT	NEEDS ATTENTION
PREMISE		X		
STORY	X			
CHARACTERS	X			
STRUCTURE	X			
DIALOGUE			X	
MARKETABILITY		X		

FEEDBACK:
Premise

Marketability

1

Current Predicted Industry Outcome:

RECOMMEND	CONSIDER	PASS
	X	

Character

Dialogue/Sound

Structure/Pace

Conclusion

Thank you for requesting coverage from Shore Scripts. If you would like to request coverage on a new draft, don't forget that you can request the same or a new reader as you prefer.

Download your FREE Copy of The Ultimate Guide to Pitching Your Screenplay and all our Contest Deadlines https://shorescripts.com/Shore_Scripts_2021_2023Calendar.icv

Details of our screenwriting contests can be found on our website: www.shorescripts.com/

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Feel free to check out more detailed samples of our coverage to help you get a feel for how a reader's comments are too.



What to expect from coverage?

- The reader will usually write their own logline based on the content of the script. How closely it matches to your own can tell you a great deal about how clear the premise is (and how quickly it's being delivered).
- The reader should detail which areas of your script are working and which aren't. Good coverage backs up comments using specifics and examples from the script which help explain a readers reasoning.
- The reader will look at your concept in relation to the wider marketplace to assess whether it's commercial, whether there's an audience out there for it, and which format would best suit the idea.
- An industry scorecard is simply a visual guide to indicate which areas need the most work and which don't. Don't take it too literally.

- Expect a 'Consider' or more likely a 'Pass'. A pass indicates that there's a lot more development to be done, while a consider means that the script could be close to being industry-ready if a few adjustments are made.

What not to expect from coverage?

- A reader isn't going to fix your screenplay for you. You have to do that. You'll receive some general suggestions and be pointed in the right direction, but ultimately, you have to make those decisions.
- A reader isn't going to rewrite your screenplay. There are services out there that offer this, but it isn't classed as coverage.
- Don't expect full on praise. It's a reader's job to offer constructive criticism rather than massage a writer's ego. It's extremely rare for a script to be graded as 'Recommend', which means that a script is almost ready to be greenlit.

HOW TO RATE FEEDBACK?

Let's not forget that all feedback is subjective. Two different readers may very well have two very different opinions on a script, which is why it can be useful to get as much feedback as possible to look for reoccurring patterns (This doesn't necessarily mean getting feedback on the same draft from multiple sources.)

Good feedback will:

- Be specific and give explanations
- Be encouraging
- Be goal-orientated
- Be suggestive, leaving the changes up to you
- Be constructive
- Exhibit knowledge of the marketplace

Bad feedback will:

- Be opinionated or judgemental
- Focus only on the flaws
- Doesn't provide actionable solutions
- Demands that specific action be taken
- Provides no reasoning behind comments made

HOW TO REACT TO FEEDBACK?

Not every note you receive will be useful, nor do you have to take action on every single note you receive, but how do you figure out which advice to take and which to ignore?

There may be the compulsion to ignore any comments that you don't agree with or to implement any comments that you do straight away, but it's well worth at least considering the consequences first.

1. Take time

Any time a writer comes back to me saying that they think they can implement the changes in a week or less, I know they haven't digested the notes properly. Most scripts receiving feedback don't just require a quick fix and even the smallest of alterations have ramifications, creating a ripple effect throughout the script. If the protagonist didn't have a strong character flaw and it's recommended that they should, that's something that's going to affect the way that character reacts and behaves in almost every scene.

2. Prepare a plan

Good coverage reports should advise on the areas needing the most work, in which case, once you've digested the notes, figure out which aspects to work on and in what order. One single rewrite is unlikely to solve every problem, so plan a list of dedicated rewrites to tackle different things, starting with the most significant. A rewrite that fills in any plot holes probably needs to be executed before one that concentrates on polishing the formatting, for example. Or doing a pass that solidifies the structure before addressing any issues with the dialogue.

3. Use your beat sheet

Any significant structural notes can be hard to take. Small changes are easy, but having to move acts and sequences around or cutting lots of scenes can almost feel like starting from scratch. It's simpler to go back and refer to your beat sheet (if you don't have one, create a new one) before deciding to implement any big changes like this.

4. Determine how useful each comment is

If you find that feedback is useful, makes sense, has been explained fully, and you understand why the comments have been made, you should consider implementing those changes. But if a comment goes against your vision or what you're trying to achieve with the story, at least give it due consideration before putting it aside.

EXERCISE

Whether you've received feedback from a professional or a non-professional, follow these steps to get the most out of every comment made: -

1. List every positive comment received, no matter how small and note whether you agreed with it or not.
2. Now write down every negative comment alongside any recommendations that were made too and again, take a note of whether you agreed or not with each comment.
3. Ignore your script. Go work on another project, whether that's a starting a new one, rewriting on old one, doing some dedicated networking, learning more about the craft, anything! (Understandably, not everyone may have the luxury of leaving a project for a month or more, so do what you can here.)
4. After sufficient time has passed, re-read the feedback and re-read your script. Do you still agree or disagree with the comments made now that you're looking at your work with fresher eyes and a little more objectivity?
5. Prepare a rewrite plan by addressing the areas that you now feel need the most work. Remember, each rewrite has a rollover effect. If one thing has been changed, then other things will need to be changed as a consequence. Tackle the big stuff first.
6. Specifically look for comments made about something not being clear enough. You're going to have to analyse exactly why a piece of information, a motivation, an out-of-character line of dialogue, or whatever was confusing, wasn't clear enough for the reader. Now find ways to ensure that there's no room for confusion by editing your script.
7. Keep going through the various rewrites you've planned out until you feel the script is in the best condition possible.
8. Consider getting more feedback on the script if you're unsure that it's industry-ready.
9. Rinse and repeat!

HOW TO DEAL WITH NEGATIVE FEEDBACK?

Even script readers have to start somewhere, so if you've ever received poor feedback, it could be due to the reader also being relatively new to the field, that they're still trying to find their own voice, or haven't quite figured out how to be diplomatic in their delivery.

Regardless of how you feel about negative comments, if you're consistently receiving the same advice or having the same faults picked up on, you may have to concede that there's a problem that needs to be addressed. If everyone's saying that they can't relate to the protagonist, for example, it's in your best interests to do more to change this.

Try "finding the note behind the note", which means examining any negative or poorly written comment to find the small kernel of truth behind it. A reader may have said it wrongly, but is there any validation to the note they gave? Figure out why they made that comment.

1. Don't take it personal

If the reader has written their report correctly, the critique should be about the work, not you as a writer. Just because a reader highlights an area that needs more work, doesn't mean that they're attacking you personally – they're doing exactly what you paid them to do.

2. Don't call out the reader

If your first response is “well, they obviously didn't get it”, you've jumped the gun. If a reader didn't understand something in a script, it's because the writer didn't make it clear enough. It's as simple as that. Remember, often a project can still be very much in the writer's head, meaning that although they know everything, such as what's motivating a character, what a symbolic image represents, or what clue leads to which reveal, that may not quite have translated onto the page just yet.

3. Look for the positives

No report should only focus on the negative parts of a screenplay. There should be some positives in there too, so take heart in those. Also, it's in your hands to turn those negatives comments into positives. Now that you know what's holding your story back, why certain aspects may not be working and why, you can make the required changes. “Writing is rewriting”. Each new draft will take you closer to the finish line (and improve your skills at the same time too).

4. Forget about it

It's good practice to have more than one project to work on. You're creating a portfolio of work after all, so hide your script away in a drawer (or desktop folder) and go work on something else for a while. After a few weeks or months, go back to the script you had feedback on with fresh eyes. You'll be surprised how often the negative comments that were made now make much more sense. This is because your writing has continued to grow and develop while you were working on something else.

HOW TO DEAL WITH POSITIVE FEEDBACK?

Who doesn't want to receive praise from someone whose read and enjoyed your script, right? But that doesn't mean that there aren't further ways to keep improving your script. Everything is a work in progress until that film is made, but one step at a time!

1. Use your strengths

Take any of the positive comments about the strengths in your writing and look to see if you can apply them to areas that still need work. If you're doing something right, you should keep doing it. Can the great way you structure plot be adapted to help improve dialogue, for example?

2. Be motivated

Learning that you're on the right path can be a great motivator, regardless of whether there were more negative comments than positive ones or not. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither is anyone's screenwriting career. Everyone will feel like they're not good enough or have imposter syndrome at some stage, so use any positive comments as encouragement during those moments.

3. Sell yourself

Any positive comments or acclaim can be used to help put yourself out there too. Obviously minimize the bragging and remain humble, but a glowing report can be used as supporting material when trying to find representation. It shows that industry professionals have something good to say about your writing.

CONCLUSION

How you handle feedback is going to have an enormous impact on how you go on and handle working in the highly collaborative business of tv or filmmaking. If you struggle to take written criticism of your work, you may also struggle to take one-on-one criticism too, so think of this as a training ground to improve your interpersonal skills as well.

No one likes negative criticism. It's difficult to take. That's why thinking of coverage as more akin to a collaboration can help dampen the pain. Both parties ultimately want the best story possible. Sure, both may have very different opinions on how to achieve that, but that's why you can now hopefully tell which feedback is worth listening to and which to ignore.

Allowing other people to read your work is a brave step to take, but remember, it's going to help you become a better writer!