

How Do I Start to Write?

1) Decide on your genre. Think about genres that really speak to you, that move you deeply.

Is this an historical epic? Are your characters real or fictional? Is this a drama? A political thriller? An action/adventure? Is this a mix of romance and comedy? Drama and historical epic? Science fiction mixed with Drama and Mythology?

2) Where did your story originate? Are you the sole author? Is it a derivative work based on other material, such as a book, magazine article, short story? Is the derivative work public record? If not, you have to acquire rights of the living person to write the story.

Maybe this was an event that occurred that you now want to write about. Maybe you “read about this person” and always wanted to write a story, incorporating this person’s story, but fictionalizing it.

Maybe you lived in the arena you want to write about—Journalism, tennis, ballet, medicine, education, the oil industry, the legal profession, politics, art, music. This is good. But if you did not live in the arena you want to write about, you need to start doing research about the arena. As you get deeper and deeper into the research, you will be amazed how inspired you will become. New ideas and perspectives will reveal themselves. You will become knowledgeable and feel that you have the depth to write a

story that is believable and “grabs” your audience!

3) Story values within your story idea – Come up with a main character who has those values.

What draws you to that story? What does the story reveal about the human condition? Your main character has psychological needs and moral needs – What are they? What happened to him/her that caused this character to have these needs? What flaws does this character have as a result of his/her psychological/moral make-up? All of this moral structure value system for your story will give it spine and a theme, and the moral structure value system of your main character will play out in the climax. So it's important to devote some time to this in the very beginning!

First in a Series about Genre: The Thriller

When you first begin your journey of writing a great story, you want to be sure that your story fits within the parameters of the correct genre. What follows are 5 main Thriller genre story structure beats that you as a writer need to hit. I am using the film, *Hostage*, starring Bruce Willis, as an example, so you can see how this works.

1) In the Thriller genre, the hero acts like a detective, but becomes the hunted. In *Hostage*, Talley IS a cop (not acting like one) and is a negotiator, usually in charge. He becomes the hunted when MAIN OPPONENT has a line on him and takes Talley's wife and daughter as hostages. Now Talley is NOT in charge.

2) In the Thriller genre, there has to be a Desire line, which is an external goal that the main character is GREATLY motivated to achieve while the main character is being pursued. Talley's Desire: Get the 2 kids out of the house while escaping attack by the Main Opponent.

Question asked in Thriller Genre: Is your suspicion justified?

We first realize that bad guys are the 3 young men who have broken into a rich man's house, taken his 2 children hostage, want to steal his money; psycho wants to abduct the daughter.

Talley first thinks their father is good guy. Then he realizes the father is in cahoots with the Main Opponent; Talley's Desire will become obsessive when the stakes are raised. He also struggles with his weakness/need, which involves his wife and daughter, with whom is having trouble communicating; his "hostage/negotiator" world has so hardened him to cynicism and he feels he has failed to rescue some of his victims, that he can't have a normal family life. This

weakness/need is the internal part of Talley's psychological and moral conflict. The Desire line is part of his external goal that will drive the story action forward.

3) The Thriller genre focuses on inner feelings of the hero. Detective should have a quality that makes him susceptible to danger. Talley's weakness/need is that he failed in his job to protect innocent children. He will die to protect innocent children who are casualties of psycho society in which he moves as a negotiator. His need to jump into the action can possibly get him killed and he is in constant conflict with the other police chief as to proper protocol vs. just jumping into action.

4) Thriller: Single suspect. Main Opponent is with a mask all the time. We don't get to see his face, but he is well-acquainted with Talley's weakness/need as he knows Talley was a chief negotiator in LA and he tried to escape that psycho world by coming to a sleepy town. The stronger and more in control that the Main Opponent is in will mean that there is a dual of wits with the hero. When the Main Opponent knows some of the hero's background, he uses that information to "get under the skin" of the hero.

5) In the Thriller genre, we can connect love to the thriller: Faith vs. skepticism. Talley loves his wife and daughter, but he lives in a world of psychos and has disconnected from his family.

Therefore, the story line will have 2 lines: Personal line and Crime line. We need to show how the hero's unique psychological and moral weakness will be solved by solving the crime.

Talley will be re-united and re-connected with his family after he saves them from certain murder by a master killer Main Opponent.

Talley's weakness/need vs. Opponent who keys in to Talley's weakness/need makes the story move forward, beat by beat, obstacle by obstacle. The 3 young bad guys are also keying into Talley's weakness/need and this also makes the story move forward, beat by beat.

Stay tuned for the coming entries, when we will look at the 7 major story beats that a writer must hit for ALL genres. We will also be looking at Story Structure, scene by scene for the genre of Thriller, using the film, *Hostage* for examples.

What is Genre?

What is Genre:

A category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, characterized by

similarities in form, style, or subject matter.

GENRE: HISTORICAL EPIC©

Is Exodus a historical epic? Is Exodus a drama/war film? Is it a historical tragedy?

Why is it so important for a story writer/screenwriter to get the genre correct from the get-go? First of all, to stay within the parameters of genre is to deliver to audiences what they have come to pay for their admission ticket. Also, characters are believable and credible. A story line that contains a spine and ultimately, a theme causes the audience/reader to sit at the edge of their seat/turn the page until the climax or epiphany is reached by the main character/hero.

It is easy for a screenwriter to grapple with genre throughout the writing process. Because there are certain elements that can or cannot be included in a specific genre, it is easy to get confused along the way. A particular story line lends itself to a certain genre. Yes, there are "cross-over" genres, but only experienced writers should attempt them. It is hard enough to write the great story with one genre in mind.

The historical epic is a genre that can include a biographical epic, such as Schindler's List or

Gandhi, or a dramatic epic, such as *Gone With the Wind* or *Gladiator*. In the biographical epic, the hero is a real character, as opposed to a fictional character. In the dramatic epic, such as *Gone with the Wind*, the hero is fictional. The story is based on real events, but the characters are fictional.

In some movie reviews, *Exodus* is listed as a drama/war genre. Drama is a genre, but not necessarily based on real historical events, such as the history of the State of Israel and all the events both before and after the creation of the State of Israel. War is not a genre. Within a drama, there can be war, certainly. And within a historical or dramatic epic there can be war.

To see *Exodus* as coming under the genre of drama is not accurate. Put simply, drama is where the hero/protagonist confronts complex human emotions, which are tested throughout the story. Drama can be a love story, such as *Love Story* or *Wuthering Heights*. Drama can be called a thematic drama, such as *The Shawshank Redemption* or *Seabiscuit*. Drama can be a psychological drama, such as *Good Will Hunting*. A drama with tragic overtones could be *The Godfather*.

To call *Exodus* an historical tragedy is not the correct genre either. A tragedy in the Greek sense is a cathartic characterization of characters who have flaws that overwhelm them. One associates tragedy with Shakespearean classics

such as Macbeth. If tragic events occur to the main characters, then certainly the story that is being portrayed is a tragedy, such as Schindler's List. But the genre is not tragedy.

Let's examine the two films that are basically on the same topic, the Israel War for Independence: Exodus, produced in 1960 and Kedma, produced in 2002.

Now, a look at just a few Exodus film critics' reviews.

Genre: Historical epic

"Exodus" 1960, Otto Preminger

Based on Leon Uris' novel, this historical epic provides a dramatic backstory to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, in the aftermath of World War II. Ari Ben Canaan (Paul Newman), a passionate member of the Jewish paramilitary group Haganah, attempts to transport 600 Jewish refugees on a dangerous voyage from Cyprus to Palestine on a ship named the Exodus. He faces obstruction from British forces, who will not grant the ship passage to its destination.

Another synopsis:

Fictional but fact-based account of the struggle for the emergence of modern Israel as an independent country and home for world Jewry.

MOVIE REVIEW (partial)

Exodus (1960)

3 1/2-Hour Film Based on Uris' Novel Opens

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

Published: December 16, 1960

THE gingerly awaited film version of Leon Uris' novel, "Exodus," which its producer-director, Otto Preminger, unveiled at the Warner Theatre last night, turns out to be a massive, overlong, episodic, involved and generally inconclusive "cinemarama" of historical and fictional events connected with the liberation of the State of Israel in 1947-1948.

Another film on the same topic as Exodus is listed as Drama/War:

Genre: Drama/War, 2002 Israeli film

"Kedma" Amos Gitai, Director/Writer

One synopsis:

In May 1948, shortly before the creation of the State of Israel, hundreds of immigrants from across Europe arrive in Palestine—only to risk arrest by British troops.

Another synopsis of Kedma from Wikipedia:

The film is a historical tragedy set during the

opening stages of Israel's 1948 War of Independence. The film follows the fate of a group of refugees from the [Holocaust](#) who are illegally brought to Israel by the [Palmach](#). When they arrive, they are chased by British soldiers. Once they escape, they are immediately drafted into the war, and take part in a grueling battle against Arab irregulars. The film centers on two long monologues, one by an Arab peasant who pledges to oppose the Jews forever; and one by an emotionally demolished refugee who laments the seemingly endless suffering of his people. Gitai intended the film to be a more realistic answer to the romanticized depiction of the war in Otto Preminger's [Exodus](#). The final shot of *Kedma* is identical to the final shot of Preminger's film.

In summary, the genre for *Exodus* and for *Kedma* is historical epic. One of the problems with *Kedma* is that the director's ego got in the way of producing a story with believable and credible characters, where the audience forms an opinion based on the story line. The film or story should stand on its own and not be an "answer" to someone else's film or vision. If the story is a tragedy, then the audience will form that conclusion when the elements of the story follow the parameters. An audience feels manipulated or confused when the spine of a story meanders in order to follow the writer's preconceived notions of what "truth" should be. The characters in the story are compelling to an audience as they go on their

journey, as opposed to a writer's pre-formulated goal for them.

TEST TIME: WHAT IS THE GENRE FOR TITANIC??? DON'T LOOK IT UP. WHAT DO YOU THINK AND WHY???

GENRE FOR TITANIC:

Titanic was indeed a ship that sank in 1912, but the characters of Jack and Rose were fictional and their love story was the catalyst that moved the action of the story forward and caused the audience to feel an enduring epiphany along with the characters. The genre for Titanic is OVERALL, historical epic, but SPECIFICALLY, a romantic/dramatic epic. JAMES CAMERON COULD – USE CROSS-GENRES LIKE A CHAMP. THE FILM IS AN ALL-TIME GREAT!!