

How the Premise Becomes a Hook!

Wouldn't it be great if you could go back in time and hear how some of your favorite movies or novels were pitched?

Benchley: "...so a Great White Shark is eating people at a beach resort, and this water-phobic sheriff has to figure out a way to kill it before the 4th of July week-end when tourism is at its peak..."

Cameron: " We know the ship sank, but did we know that a young man in steerage class was aboard to sacrifice his life to save the love of his life?"

The actual "pitching" is really saying what your premise is by first stating your main character; next comes the inciting incident that catapults your main character into action and conflict; and last is the outcome of the story, or what it is that the main character needs

to do to solve his problem.

The premise of your story becomes “high concept” when you employ a “conflagration of opposites” methodology. This means that an immediately unlikely situation occurs in the story. For example: What if a man decides to dress up as a nanny in order to get to see his children after a divorce decree prevents him from having custody? What if there were a lawyer who suddenly could not tell a lie? Because lying is how lawyers make their living...

This “conflagration of opposites” can also be called a hook, which is the idea that sells the story. It isn't the story itself, because the hook doesn't *tell* you what happens next – instead, it *sets up the question* “what happens next?” You can transcend what has been done before by added an epic element. i.e. Man's struggle against nature; the human race will be destroyed; a societal breakdown of the family structure will occur.

Once you have your high-concept premise,

it should be no longer than 28 words. This would be like sending a text message that needs to include only the 3 main elements: main character; inciting incident; end game of the story. You can use this 28-words as your elevator speech; your pitch; your focus when you are writing your story. If you find yourself getting off-course, refer back to the high-concept premise to remind yourself exactly what your story is about.

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!

What is my Premise?

Blog Post 4-30-15 Premise examples

We are at the VERY BEGINNING of the writing process for a great story idea you have been toying with for years. Do you buy screenwriting software and plug in your characters and start typing away? Answer: NO. THIS IS THE DEATH KNEEL FOR A STORY. AFTER A FEW PAGES, YOU WILL BE LOST.

TAKE YOUR TIME AND...Start with the Premise. A premise in screenplay writing is also called a Log Line. If you stand in a parking lot and yell across to a friend and tell the friend what the story is about, you should require only one or two sentences. In Premise talk, you should be able to tell what your story is about in approximately 25 words or less.

A Premise is a combination of character and plot. It is NOT theme, not a character's weakness, not every detail in the story, not a sequence of events. It should include the following:

1. The inciting incident
2. The main character
3. The outcome (highly summarized) of the story

A Premise gives you the “High Concept” of the story. The “high concept” is the premise with a flip. The Premise should also enable the reader to tell what the genre is in those concise 25 words. The Premise should NEVER be the same as a movie you have seen. The Premise should never be an idea that you cannot develop into a story that has all the structure beats.

Here are examples of some famous Premises:

JAWS – Great white shark eats tourists off a small East Coast island community; a conflict-avoiding, water-phobic sheriff has to go out and kill it. (24 words)

The Inciting Incident in **JAWS** is when someone is eaten alive by the Great White. The main character is the sheriff. The outcome of the story is that the Great White is killed.

MRS. DOUBTFIRE – a Divorced Dad who misses his kids disguises himself as a British nanny and is hired by his ex- so he can see his kids more. (26 words)

The Inciting Incident in **MRS. DOUBTFIRE** is when the divorced dad is told by a judge that his wife

has sole custody of his kids. The main character is the divorced dad. The outcome of the story is that the divorced dad will be able to see his kids.

THE FIRM – A young lawyer joins a law firm, only to be told by FBI he'll be indicted soon since it is Mafia-owned; no one quits. (25 words)

The Inciting Incident in **THE FIRM** is when the young lawyer joins a law firm. The main character is the young lawyer. The outcome of the story is that the young lawyer will find a way out of the Mafia-owned firm without getting killed.

Please open the pdf attachment in our Blog: Premise Examples. This is a page from a typical cable t.v. listing of films for the week. Note that several films are about 50 years old. The Premise Line concept was not as prevalent with the older films. In the 1980's, the Premise Line concept started to be a requirement by the Hollywood studios.

Practice writing down the 3 main components of each Premise Line. Be aware of the "High Concept" and the genre for each film. The more you do this exercise, the better equipped you will be to start writing your own Premise Lines.