



## Story Idea Workbook

For use with coming up with screenplay ideas and reminding ourselves of how a story is put together. A story idea may come from personal experience, a newspaper article, inspiration from reading poetry, listening to a song, remembering a dream, admiring a work of art. ...

...where ever the idea originated from the writer has chosen it because it has meaning that is in some way important to them.

## **1. Thinking backwards**

Why are you writing this screenplay?

What do you want to happen when it is completed? Will you be making the film yourself, do you want to make money from selling the script, how will you go about doing this? I think it is important to have a plan in place from the start.

Consider what the next step is in your career, will you be writing a short film with the hope of getting your first screenplay made for screen. Do you have plans on how you will sell your script once it is complete. Sometimes it is good to be fully researched and have an idea of what you are going to do after your script is complete. For instance a first time writer might start with a low budget screenplay idea as it would be more likely to be made.

**What is the purpose of your screenplay ?**

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**e.g. Why I wrote my short film - I wanted to create a film that could be made. I wanted it to be good enough (or at least stand a chance) at being showcased at top film festivals. I decided to cut my screenplay down to 5 pages as I knew a shorter film would more likely to be shown in festivals than a 10-15 min long short film.**

## 2. Harbour an Idea

An idea can begin as a single image, a character, a situation, the musical score, a location.. you might have an ending in mind, you might only have the opening shot. An idea is only the beginning and does not need to be a fully developed story before you begin writing. You can figure out the themes and elements of the story as you go along.

How other screenplays began -

Based on a true story - The wolf on wall street. Influenced by another film – Star Wars. Based on a short film –Evil Dead. Based on a legend – Mulan. Influenced by Dreams – Blue Velvet. Inspired by art –Metropolis. The writer's own life – Taxi Driver, Being John Malkovich. Based on a short story – Little shop of horrors. Inspired by Poetry – O brother where art thou. Would I have been friends with my parents in high school? - Back to the Future. Spending time with my niece during summer holidays– My neighbour Totoro.

**What are your original ideas?**

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**e.g. My idea – My short film script started out as an image. I described the image with words and drew a few sketches before padding it out with themes, characters and locations.**

### **3. Identify a genre**

The word genre means 'category type'. All genres have conventions that may be played with or ignored. These conventions are called Semantic elements (for example in a western these elements could be – guns, cowboys, deserts, John Wayne). Audiences develop an understanding that certain expectations may be fulfilled in a genre story and they can find pleasure in predicting what will happen next.

The use of genre can make it easier to provide escapism for an audience, it can help create a template for the writer, it can help make it easier to sell the film later on. Genre is not a method that should exist to make story ideas formulaic, however almost any story can fit into a genre category.

**Horror, Thriller, Road Movie, Comedy, Right of passage, Drama, Action, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Disaster Movie, Crime, Western, Historical, Surrealist, Film noir, Mystery, Musical, Martial arts**

**Can you identify the genre of your story? what conventions are expected of this genre –**

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**e.g. – My short film – I don't partially wish to work within a genre. However I could identify my story as surrealist/drama. It uses some conventions of surrealism - dreams, little dialogue, juxtaposition of dreams and reality. and deals with contemporary issues – depression, hikikomori, quarter life crisis,**

#### **4. Respecting the Premise**

The premise - what is the story telling us as an audience. As human beings we tell stories to try and make sense of the world. What is the whole point of the story, in a romance the premise may be as simple as in Romeo and Juliet – love conquers all. The premise of Little Red Riding hood is – Children should not talk to strangers. There is often a meaning behind all stories that can be written down in a sentence or two.

The premise is the internal life of a story. e.g. Avatar – Greed and disrespect of nature leads to destruction and despair. The synopsis is the external pull of the story - A band of humans are pitted in a battle against a distant planet's indigenous population.

It is important to identify the themes throughout the story and respect the stories overall premise. Often writers find themselves stuck when they steer away from the premise. It is good practice to remind yourself whilst writing of what you are trying to say to an audience - this will help with the writing flow.

**Identify the themes/premise within your story –**

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**My Short film – I wanted to say something about why so many young adults are becoming depressed and that modern day life is putting too much pressure on its youth. My premise might be as simple as – growing up is hard. Or – There are too many expectations being put on kids these days to succeed.**

## **5. A short synopsis**

When writing a story - when the themes and ideas have been found - I always write down a short synopsis to remind myself of what the story is about. I developed this synopsis throughout the writing process - by having one to begin with, I keep the story on track and thus find it harder to get writers block.

Whenever I get stuck I remind myself of the synopsis and premise of the story.

Synopsis – A brief outline of the plot

Examples – My neighbour totoro – two young girls move into a new house and discover that in the nearby forest lives a magical creature called totoro. Back to the Future - A young man is accidentally sent thirty years into the past by his time travelling friend.

**Write down your stories synopsis (it is ok to edit/develop this whilst writing) -**

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**e.g. My short film synopsis - A young woman escapes into her imagination to avoid the pressures of life**

## Recap

A story idea can come from anywhere, the story idea will develop by giving it a genre and themes. The story is given life through a premise and structure through a synopsis.

...Of course every writer has a different process, the one given in this workbook is my own and I use this method whenever I write fiction.

- Thinking backwards – keep in mind why you are writing your screenplay what do you hope to achieve from it once it is complete, how will you go about doing this
- Harbour an idea – An idea can be as simple as an image in your mind, thoughts on exploring a topic, the original idea can change and evolve in time
- Identify a genre – genre can help with the stories themes and make story creation easier
- Respect the premise – the premise is the most important part of there story, it is the life inside of the story and it should be present throughout the whole screenplay
- A short synopsis – By creating a brief outline of the plot you can stop yourself from getting side tracked whilst writing. I always reference my synopsis and premise whenever I write

**I hope this has been useful. More resources can be found in the [resource library](#)**

**amy**