

## LOG LINES

Log lines are tools for the development process. A log line translates 120 pages of action into one simple idea. This is so that a busy development executive will have a reasonably accurate reference point for each script.

A log-line is also what helps you determine whether your story is structurally sound. The great Broadway playwright and producer David Belasco: "If you can't write your idea on the back of my calling card, you don't have a clear idea."

It's a difficult question because there is never a single, authoritative log line for a script. Each script will have as many different log lines as there are readers.

It's not necessary for your log line to mention character names. A strong character trait will do - with a dramatic teaser about the story.

All log lines go back to that ancient storyteller's formula, "What would happen if a character like x ended up in a situation like y."

Next add a specific catch word that quickly tell the reader what the story is about. Is it about love, greed, obsession murder, family turmoil?

Once you're set on one or two words you can push out from there adding a few more economical adjectives and verbs to make up your long line.

This is the story about \_\_\_\_\_ who \_\_\_\_\_

Some key words: hero; flaw; lifechanging event; opponent; ally and; battle.

A high concept log line makes a story out of one of the most universal -

human emotions: fear, love, hate, envy, etc .

Or

deadly sins: anger, greed, lust, etc .

Or

plot motivators: betrayal , vengeance, discovery, rebirth, survival , etc .

Or

virtues: loyalty, faith, responsibility, etc .

#### EXAMPLES:

AMERICAN BEAUTY: "The arrival of a troubled family in a small New Jersey suburb collides with their new neighbor's midlife crisis; the result leads to murder, a frame-up, and two innocents going to prison."

the official DreamWorks SKG log line:

"Stuck in a dull life and a loveless marriage, a man stakes out a new direction that ends up costing him his life."

ET: "A meek and alienated little boy finds a stranded extraterrestrial and has find the courage to defy authorities to help the alien return to its home planet."

GONE WITH THE WIND: "Against the backdrop of the great Civil War, a narcissistic Southern beauty, obsessed with idyllic love, struggles to reconstruct her life and finds her true love is closer than she thinks."

#### HERO / FLAW /BATTLE structure:

ROCKY: A boxer (hero) with a loser mentality (flaw) is offered a chance by the world champ (opponent) to fight for the title (lifechanging event) but, with the help of his lover (ally) must learn to see himself as a winner before he can step into the ring (battle).

STEEL MAGNOLIAS: An overprotective (flaw) mother (hero) must overcome her own fears in order to allow her diabetic daughter (opponent and ally) to risk death to give birth (lifechanging event), then must fight to make sense of her daughter's losing battle against death (battle).

CASABLANCA: A jaded (flaw) WWII casino owner (hero) in Nazi-occupied Morocco sees his former lover (opponent) arrive (lifechanging event), accompanied by her

husband (ally) whose heroism forces the hero to choose between his cynicism, his feeling for his ex-lover, and his once-strong feelings of patriotism (battle).

Themes:

A woman or family in jeopardy?

CAPE FEAR: A lawyer's family is stalked by a man he once helped put in jail.

An ordinary woman in extraordinary circumstances?

ERIN BROCKOVICH: An unemployed single mother becomes a legal assistant and almost single-handedly brings down a California power company accused of polluting a city's water supply.

Men or women on a mission?

SAVING PRIVATE RYAN: US soldiers try to save their comrade who's stationed behind enemy lines.

AMERICAN PIE: Four teenage boys make a pact to lose their virginity by prom night.

A man or woman against nature?

CASTAWAY: A FedEx executive must transform himself physically and emotionally to survive after a crash landing on a deserted island.

CLIFFHANGER: A retired mountain climber must conquer an unclimbable peak to save the survivors of a plane crash from certain death.

A man or woman against nature? the system?

PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT: A pornography publisher becomes the unlikely defender of free speech.

CLASS ACTION: A female attorney finds that her nemesis is her own father, and must choose between her corporate client and justice.

A woman escaping from something or someone she loves.

**ENOUGH:** On the run from an abusive husband, a young mother begins to train herself to fight back.

And don't forget: Documentaries have loglines too:

**GRIZZLY MAN:** A wildlife preservationist tries to become at one with a population of grizzlies and falls victim to their essential wildness.

**FAHRENHEIT 9/11:** The Twin Towers terrorist plot not only destroyed a United States landmark, the response to it destroyed the United States' moral authority in the world.

**ENRON: THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM:** The quest for ever more profitable financial plays leads Enron executives to market manipulation, fraud, and, finally, the collapse of not just a company but an entire financial system.