



# 5 ESSENTIAL TIPS

## For Writing A Professional Screenplay



**Hi, I'm movie producer, Mitchell Peck. I've produced 3 studio movies, and made 10+ major studio script development deals -- all with scripts that I developed with first time screenwriters. Each script I've successfully developed has benefitted from the following process and principles:**

### **#1 STUDY YOUR GENRE USING BEAT SHEETS**

**You should know what kind of story you're telling, and to which genre it belongs. Pick 3 of your favorite movies within the genre. Watch them with a remote control; pause after every scene in order to write 2 sentences: the first sentence should summarize the action of that scene - namely, how it advances the story; and the second sentence should describe the character dynamic at work in the scene. These are the dramatic "beats" of the movie. When listed sequentially, this document is called a "beat sheet." It contains the DNA of the movie.**

**Compare the beat sheets for your three favorite movies within the genre; study them. You will see similarities in the way the stories flow/move, when characters get introduced, when obstacles arise, etc. After you've absorbed these truths, you can choose to follow the proven path, or to disregard it...but at least you'll have a roadmap to guide you.**

### **#2 GET HONEST FEEDBACK, AND PLENTY OF IT**

**Have as many people read your script as possible. Get honest feedback from them. Encourage criticism. Ask about the overall strengths and weaknesses, but dwell on the problems because only once they're identified can you address/fix them: what about the plot didn't they like; what characters bored them, etc. Take notes. Don't try to debate or persuade them – the script should speak for itself.**



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After you have exhausted all your friendly readers, go find more readers – join a writers group, ask your state's Film Commissioner for help, visit the local film schools, get it covered through a service (if you can afford it), etc. Be exhaustive. Rewrite it endlessly (provided you agree with the notes) because your script will only get one chance to make a good first impression.

### #3 MAKE THE AUDIENCE CARE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR PROTAGONIST

The single most important job a screenwriter must accomplish is to make us care about what happens to his Protagonist. Specifically, there are 2 ways to achieve this when setting-up the main character:

- (1) Make him human, relatable. Put him in a circumstance/situation that enables us to see his humanity. Don't worry about making him "likable"...just make him empathetic.
- (2) Give him an easily understood emotional condition – desire, anger, frustration, etc. Some kind of dramatic impulse that will propel him forward into the story.

Part of what makes the Protagonist human in the beginning of movie is being emotionally relatable, and having active desires and goals. Because of this, we will empathize and identify with him as he goes on his life-changing journey.

### #4 HAVE YOUR PROTAGONIST UNDERGO A PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

A movie is always about one story: the most transformative moment/event/time in a main character's life. How they fell in love, how they overcame disability, how they became an adult, how they saved the world, etc.



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Consider your story this light, and it will help you organize it. Where does the Protagonist begin his journey in your story? What are his goals? What/who are his obstacles? How does he change while in pursuit of this goal? What is the transformative event? Ultimately, where does the Protagonist end up in your story?

For the mainstream Western audiences, movies are always stories about personal transformation.

## #5 MAKE YOUR ANTAGONIST STRONGER THAN YOUR PROTAGONIST

If possible, make your Antagonist stronger, more dynamic and more compelling than your Protagonist. Give the Antagonist a logic that's motivated, understandable and achievable -- he's probably going to succeed.

A powerful Antagonist will help you to create a storyline with a much greater energy, stakes, intensity -- and emotional payoff, when the Protagonist eventually overcomes him to realize his own personal transformation, and his goals.

Remember, your movie is about the most transformative moment/event/time in your main character's life and, accordingly, he must do something greater than he's ever been required to do in order to overcome the powerful forces arrayed against him.

## (BONUS TIP)

## #6 START LATE, END EARLY, AND BE ECONOMICAL

In every scene of the script, start as late as possible and end as early as possible. Be ruthless about cutting away the chaff. For starters, minimize greetings and goodbyes. Ask yourself what the scene's about, how it advances the story, and what elements (characters, dialogue, description, etc.) are necessary in order to fully convey its purpose? Then, pare away the rest of the elements in the scene that do not address/serve these headline questions. Be economical with your dialogue and descriptions.