

## LOGLINE CREATION

### ELEMENTS

Fundamentally, a good log line will be a single sentence that will include five elements.

The subject of the sentence will describe (1) an imperfect but passionate and active PROTAGONIST. The verb will depict (2) the BATTLE. And the direct object will describe (3) an insurmountable ANTAGONIST who tries to stop the protagonist from reaching (4) a physical GOAL on account of (5) the STAKES, if the goal is not reached.

Finally, the log line is even better if the words chosen in its writing can enhance the story's marketability by suggesting the movie's total concept:

- Genre
- Setting
- Visual Style
- Ironic hook
- Emotional context
- Heartfelt passion, and
- Visceral action.

### VERB

The verb you choose to depict the *struggle* must be visual and active. After all this is a movie, not a play or a novel. Thus, the log line verb should be one of the following, or one like them that best suits the genre:

**struggle, battle, contends, wrestles, grapples, scuffles, fights, wages war, jousts, duels, spars, scraps, opposes, takes on, clashes, quarrels, feuds, or crusades.**

### STRUCTURE

Now, take all those elements and put them into a compelling sentence in this order:

**[protagonist]...[verb]...[antagonist]...[goal]...[stakes].**

What if it doesn't sound right? Then, rewrite it. You do know what a *rewrite* is, don't you? As formulaic as all this sounds, expect to rewrite your log line many, many times --- not necessarily at first, but over the time that you develop your story and script.

### MORAL PREMISE

Having written the book *The Moral Premise*, it's only fitting that I reference it here. While the log line describes the PHYSICAL essence of the story, the *moral premise statement* describes the inner working, or the PSYCHOLOGICAL essence of the story. If you're not familiar with the moral premise statement

construction, here's an example. Its purpose is to articulate the arc of the story from psychological value to physical consequence. For instance:

Fear leads to paralysis; but  
Courage leads to action.

The log line only hints at the context of the moral premise statement. Both are necessary to write a strong story that touches both physical and psychological beats.

Again, it's worth repeating, log lines tell us what the movie is about **PHYSICALLY**; it is why people go to a particular movie. And the moral premise statement (or moral premise line) tells us what the movie is about **PSYCHOLOGICALLY**; it explains the motivations of the characters the **PHYSICAL** action they take.

Audiences leave the theater thinking well or ill of a movie based on their subconscious awareness of the moral premise's truth and consistency. Start with a good log line. Then, establish a true and consistent moral premise statement. With those two tools in hand you'll be well on your way.

#### **4 QUESTIONS AND 4 ANSWERS**

My friend Jeffrey Alan Schechter makes the justifiable claim that a good log line should clearly and unambiguously answer these **FOUR QUESTIONS**:

1. Who is your main character?
2. What is he or she trying to accomplish?
3. Who is trying to stop him or her?
4. What happens if he or she fails?

The answers to those questions, which **MUST BE** embodied in the log line, are:

1. A sympathetic character, who is
2. trying to accomplish a compelling goal while being opposed by...
3. a powerful and committed opponent, over
4. life and death stakes.

Log lines, as I said above, are the place that writers start. Log lines help to focus the filmmaking team as they moves through the process of writing, development, attachment, production, and then marketing. But the best log lines are usually written **AFTER** the movie is finished. Why? Because movies are made three times: in the writing, in the shooting, and in the finishing. And it's not until it's all over that we really know what the film is about, and what the characters are **REALLY** about. At any rate, log lines are critical to understanding what makes a good story.

#### **EXAMPLES**

Here are a few good log line examples.

- A naïve young man battles heartless authorities to protect the life of his girlfriend when it's revealed that she's not human— she's a mermaid.

- A police chief, with a phobia for open water, battles a gigantic shark with an appetite for swimmers and boat captains, in spite of a greedy town council who demands that the beach stay open.
- A Parisian rat teams up with a man with no talent to battle convention and the critics that anyone can cook and open their own restaurant.
- A lawyer who loses his ability to lie for 24-hours, clashes with his ex-wife for the affection of their son and the healing of their family.
- A young farmer from a distant planet joins the rebellion to save his home planet from the evil empire when he discovers he is a warrior with legendary psychokinesis powers.

### **GIVE IT TIME – BUT DON'T STOP**

Nothing good comes easily. That adage begins and ends with log lines. Their importance in the movie industry cannot be understated. The human mind requires a respite from time-to-time to reach its full potential. Within your mind is the capacity to not only write a good log line, but construct the good story that goes with it. Write hard each day. But then relax and do something that involves physical activity aside from sitting in a chair and bending over a computer. Writing is hard work -- but you need exercise, too. I spend the mornings writing. In the afternoon I chop logs, garden, sail and chase my wife around town. You'll be surprised how your mind assimilates and solves problems when you're not trying to force it. As your project develops never stop coming back to your log line and see if you can make it that strong, pithy pitch that will sell your story.