

HOW TO SELF DIAGNOSE YOUR SCRIPT



THE **THEATERMAKERS** STUDIO

THE EXECUTION PLAN SERIES

INTRODUCTION

So you've got a script, which is a great start. But, is your script in tip-top shape? Is it in a place that you feel confident enough in to start submitting to festivals, producers or even putting up on stage yourself? Let me tell you, no matter where you are in your process, your script can ALWAYS use a checkup. And that's exactly what you're going to learn in this Execution Plan.

On average I read 2-3 scripts per week. I get scripts from agents, [script coverage clients](#), TheaterMakers Studio members and I've performed checkups on hundreds of scripts over the years. If you can put the 5 steps to self-diagnose your script and the 3 components of every successful script in action, then your script will be in tip-top shape in no time!

PRO TIP

Learn the fundamentals of storytelling! Check out these three must-read books for self-diagnostics:

- [Aristotle's Poetics](#)
- [The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler](#)
- [Beating Broadway by Steve Cuden](#)

PART I: THE FIVE-STEP PROCESS TO SELF-DIAGNOSING YOUR SCRIPT

First off, nothing has taught me more about writing for the theatre than reading scripts. Not just the classics, but everything! Because we want to make you a master, and we want to do it quickly, here's an overview of the five-step process to self-diagnosing your script:

Step 1: Identify the type of script you've written. What genre is it: is it a comedy? A drama? And be specific. Is it a courtroom drama? A jukebox musical?

Step 2: Google and find a list of the top 10 most successful scripts in that genre. This way, you can get an idea of what the shows in that genre actually are. Once you know what you're up against, you can better craft your own script.

Step 3: Read them. That's it, plain and simple.

Step 4: Take notes on what they have in common with each other, and perhaps with your script as well. And remember: specific is terrific. What you're learning from this are the distinguishing characteristics that make these scripts successful. This alone will increase your chances for success.

Step 5: Compare those elements with your script. This is an incredibly easy way to diagnose where you are with your script in relation to those others. It allows and helps you to become an expert in your niche, because the world is becoming Niche'd Out. If you're working on a specific niche (i.e. courtroom drama, jukebox musical, etc.), you have to examine other plays in that genre and learn from them. If you don't find similarities between those plays and your script, you either know you're looking at the wrong genre, or you have some serious edits to make!

PART 2:

THE THREE COMPONENTS OF EVERY SUCCESSFUL SCRIPT

Do you know what the most amazing machine is? The human body. The human body is full of all sorts of parts that keep it running for so darn long. But it's also full of parts that aren't necessary. Things like your tonsils, your gallbladder, and your appendix. Although without a heart or a brain, you will die. I'm not a doctor or anything, but I'm pretty sure that's true. The same goes for your script. Sure, it can have an appendix here or there, maybe a tonsil or two, but without a heart or brain, your script will perish.

So what are those main components? What are the hearts and brains of your script?

The first key component of every successful script: A HERO. You need a main character, a protagonist, someone who your audience will follow along on your journey. Some heroes have flaws, but you always have to write your hero to be likable in some way so that the audience can stand behind him or her and root for your hero to succeed.

PRO TIP

Often the primary character is the first person seen or heard from in a script. By introducing the protagonist first, it's an easy way for an audience to know what story to follow and who the Hero of the story is.

The second component: AN OBJECTIVE. What does the Hero want? It must be something very specific. Not just a woman, but Tina, a curly-haired blonde who wears mink fur and red lipstick. Make sense? The Objective has to be something extremely important that the Hero is passionate about.

The third component: THE OBSTACLE. This is the wall between the Hero and their Objective. Put something big and bold in the way—an obstruction. The Hero wants something badly, but something huge (sometimes an antagonist) gets in the Hero's way. This is also called conflict. It can be other people, the protagonist (himself/herself), the government, etc. This is where the drama unfolds, because they are so passionate about what they want that they will do anything to get it.

Checklist: Do you have the following elements clearly defined in your script? Define them.

- ☐ Hero: _____
- ☐ Hero's Objective: _____
- ☐ Hero's Obstacle: _____

If you cannot succinctly write the answer within the space given above, you may not have a clearly defined Hero, Objective and/or Obstacle. This could be an area of improvement!

PART 3:

WHERE MOST SCRIPTS GO WRONG AND HOW TO AVOID IT

There is one big place where most scripts go wrong. If you don't get this right, this is where audiences won't care anymore.

Big. Juicy. STAKES.

The stakes for your Hero have to be huge! Even if you feel like they are as high as they can go... I can guarantee they can go higher. The Hero's journey has to feel like a life or death situation even if it isn't.

Not every show is about someone dying, but your task is to make it feel like your Hero is going to live or die if they do / don't accomplish their goal. Whether it's *Death of a Salesman* or *Romeo and Juliet*, there's no doubt that they are full of life-or-death stakes.

PRO TIP

High stakes are not just for dramas! Comedies have some of the highest stakes imaginable! Think of a musical comedy like *Book of Mormon* and the life or death stakes for Elder Price and Elder Cunningham! If they went to Uganda and were met with no resistance to Mormonism or their cultural differences, would that be a very interesting show? No. It's all about their passionate desire to spread Mormonism and the struggle they face when doing so.

PRO POP QUIZ

Answer this: What would happen to my Hero if he or she did not get what he or she wanted?
(Hint: It better be devastating!)

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PART 4: **HOW TO GET (HELPFUL) FEEDBACK FROM OTHERS**

Even though I want you to be a self-reliant writer, you can only get so far by yourself... which is when you ask others for help.

WARNING: Asking people can be overwhelming and can create more confusion than clarity. When others start chiming in, you have to remember that it's your script. Love, listen, and learn from feedback, but at the end of the day, you're going to live or die by what you put on that stage. Always go with your gut and the story you really want to tell.

How then should you know what feedback to follow?

When you've heard the same note three times from three different people, that's when you should really listen.

KEN'S TOP THREE FEEDBACK TOOL:

Create a survey or an email to ask your readers:

1. Their top three favorite moments in your script
2. Their top three least favorite moments
3. Aggregate the responses and list them from top to bottom

When you get enough responses you will have a to-do list AND it'll be in priority order. You'll know what works best and what you need to work on the most. Producers, Investors and all industry types have super busy schedules. The dates AND times of your presentation or production are going to be one of the first things that your target looks for when they get the invite. And depending on how complicated their schedule is on that day, then they'll decide whether or not to make room for you and your show. So make sure the "when" is very prominent and easy to find.



PART 5:

THE REWRITE

This is where your script is REALLY written. Writers spend most of their time rewriting. In the theatre, your script isn't going to be finished until opening night. Costume changes require more lines here, audiences don't laugh there, the set designer can't make this work, etc. Just embrace the fact that your script will always have to evolve.

Remember: your script is like you—constantly striving to be better.

I know, it's hard to rewrite. That's why I came up with this rewriting process:

1. Determine your deadline.
2. Determine the number of scenes, moments, etc. that need to be rewritten (use "The Top Three Feedback Tool" to create this list).
3. Calculate how many scenes, etc. that you need to write per day to achieve your goal. (If your deadline is in ten days and you need to rewrite twenty scenes, that means you need to rewrite two scenes a day).
4. Set a time every day to accomplish this mini-goal.

And before you know it, the rewriting will be done, your show will be up, and it'll be wowing audiences on opening night.

I hope you've enjoyed my "Five-Step Process to Self-Diagnosing Your Script." I guarantee that if you follow each step, you will without a doubt improve your script. And when you do that, you have a much greater chance of achieving all the things you want to achieve and more.

In this plan I've talked about a few ways you can improve your script, and if you'd like a complete overview of this process, I encourage you to join **The TheaterMakers Studio** and take my "How to Self-Diagnose Your Script" Online Workshop.

And as a writer, there are over a dozen workshops and resources available exclusively on **The TheaterMakers Studio** that could be of real practical help to you, including:

- How to Write a Script in 30 Days
- Diving Into Royalty Pools
- How to Make a Living Through Licensing
- How to Get the Rights to . . . Anything
- How to Get Producers to See Your Show
- And over a dozen more workshops available!

To join The TheaterMakers Studio, visit www.theatermakersstudio.com!