TREATMENTS

put on board the words ANTICIPATION and MANIPULATION

AM: “A shooting script is not a screenplay. The beginning writer shd eb discouraged from trying to invent stories in screenplay format”

This is why treatments, synopses, proposals etc are so important.

The screenplay is what you do only when you have your story, when you have the structure, the shape, when the drama is clear and everything ties together. Don’t start writing the script until then.

At Blake Friedmann we tend to see how a large cross-section of writers work. I don't believe that every writer should write treatments in exactly the same way. Any more than I believe that you can only tell stories in only one way. The story is not the same as the ways you might chose to tell it.

The relationship between form and content is an endlessly fascinating one for those of us who work with writers. Genius lies in making a story look so natural that the reader or viewer cannot conceive of it being done any other way!

In the experience of our agency - and we receive over 800 submissions every month - the weakest parts of most submissions are the idea followed by the structure. It would appear that proper treatments or proposals have rarely been written before the script which we receive. Proposals or treatments are undervalued by most people in the industry and, as a consequence, few writers are really good at them.
Proposals or treatments are the perfect tool for:

- developing ideas
- developing characters
- exploring the motivation of those characters
- finding the best way to tell - or to structure - a story
- finding the best way to pitch a story (pitching and telling are different as we shall see)
- and finally, treatments are excellent for finding the best way to market a story

Treatments are also useful to many people in the industry **other** than writers: editors, publishers, producers, script editors or development executives, directors, agents, actors, distributors, publicists and competition of film fund directors. Everybody on the creative side of the business needs them. And it is really up to writers to provide them.

There are some long-running series or soaps where storyliners provide a form of treatment for the writer. But unfortunately that is not always the case, so writers have to be able to do it themselves.

But what should a treatment look like? It seems so obvious that we all know what one is, until we ask the question.

There are minor differences between the words :proposal, treatment, synopsis, outline, storylines, log line, pitch document and whatever. I am going to use the following definitions: but they are arbitrary. If you are commissioned to write a storyline or a treatment, make sure that you ask exactly what it is that they want you to do. Ask for a sample of the format, so that you get that right. There are no industry-standard definitions, usually a proposal will include a treatment.

So, our definitions today are as follows:

TREATMENT: A description of the story for a film, for an episode of drama or for a novel written in prose and usually in the present tense. A treatment can make statements of intent ('the chase builds to a gripping climax') but be careful not to make too many claims for it.

So if you use the word synopsis or outline, that is fine. I am using the word TREATMENT because I like the fact that it implies you have made choices about how you are going to "treat" the story.

There can be short and long treatments for the same story. In the film business a long one can also be called a **STEP OUTLINE**: This is because here you break down the story into each major scene.

You can also have a scene by scene breakdown of the story you are telling as you plan a novel. Until you actually start writing the script or the main body of the novel, you can't possibly have worked it all out, and that you will surely change and deviate from your original storyline or treatment. So it doesn't matter if you put down things you later change or omit. But your document must have an integrity as a story, it must hang together. As Aristotle said: *It must have a unity.*

So a step-outline is as complete as possible. It is usually **not** a selling document and often does not read easily. It is a work-in-progress document for you to use by yourself or with the dramaturg you are working with.

The **PITCH DOCUMENT** can be several documents, as was suggested in the information that was sent to you prior to the workshop. Because you may need different pitches for different occasions, I usually suggest that you prepare three basic pitches: a one-liner, a one paragraph, and a one page version. This gives you some options.

However, for most writers and for most speculatively-done work, going into quite a lot of detail will pay off. If you are not a writer and do not intend to write the book or script, but you are developing ideas for which you will find or hire writers, these steps are also extremely useful.

So, I suggest that your treatments should have several sections. I recommend dividing your treatment up into 4 basic parts, each one of which is a separate document:

1. The blurb, eg back of paperback best-seller. This should be say half a page. You should at all costs avoid trying to TELL the story here. This section is much closer to the short pitch for a project, where you are trying to **sell** the story, rather than **tell** the story.

2. The character biogs. By putting them in a separate section from the actual storlyline, you don't clutter that up. You also enable the listener or

reader to have the characters and their psychological makeup and backgrounds in mind when they read about the events of the story. This should make for greater impact.

3. Intention: why are you writing this. Is there a particular reason you have chosen it, are you particularly well-qualified to be the writer of it. This gives the reader of your treatment some insight into your committment to it. It is also likely to be authentic.

4. The story. This is the difficult part. The narrative storyline, written in the present tense: 'As the sun rises we see a body lying twisted on the beach...'. This makes the reader feel that they are there.

5. Dialogue samples. There is a fifth section you can add: some passages of dialogue, to give voice to your characters. This can be added in the section of character biographies, just a few lines spoken by each character revealing their voice, their attitude. If the content of these nuggets of dialogue reveal tantalising glimpses of the story, so much the better. Please make sure that your characters speak with different speech patterns and vocabularies.

Don't assume that you can just rush out a quick treatment because you intend to spend a lot of time later on the script. If you do believe that a script should go through, say, five rewrites (and I think that is almost certainly too few), then your treatment should go through ten rewrites. And the more you rework the treatment, the less times you should have to rewrite the book or script. That is really true.

A treatment is a way of thinking about something that you want to write. It is not a 'restrictive practice', a series of constraints put on you by a producer or broadcaster or even by yourself. Used properly, writing a treatment should be a liberating and stimulating experience.

Liberating because it frees you at a time before it matters if you go off the rails; stimulating because when you are writing you know that what you are writing already works.

But many writers claim that they hate writing treatments, are really bad at them, it is not real writing, they have never been shown a well-written treatment, or have never been told why or how to write one.

So why do it? For every writer who has claimed to have benefited from going through various drafts of a treatment **before** writing the script, I have come across some others who claim that if they spend too much time constructing treatments or synopses or outlines, this takes the spontaneity out of their writing. One writer told me that he got bored because he knew what was going to happen next, and the boredom showed.

I don't know if that was true. But it was clearly more important to him to feel good while writing, than what his audience felt about the story when they

read it. He was not as successful as his writing talent promised.

It is similar to the danger - feared by some writers - that if they rewrite too often it kills the novel or script. I hope to show you that judicious work on the idea at the treatment stage will usually result in a first draft that works pretty well. Rewrites are not only fewer, they are usually far less radical. The danger of having to perform major surgery on your work is considerably less. This seems to me to be a good thing.

Working on treatments is not easy. You always have to be several steps ahead before you are ready to be. This was described in a different way by Robert McKee, when I attended his tour de force three-day marathon on story structure. In one of the moments when he allowed questions, someone asked how long it should take to write a script. McKee said “Six months, but you shouldn’t start writing for five and a half months!”

What happens in those five and a half months? You are in development heaven or development hell, working on your treatment.

For many writers, what they do is intimate and difficult to show to others. It **is** a solitary business and this isolation usually does not help. An increasing number of writers have begun working in writers’ groups, so that they get to read each others’ early drafts and they learn the value of giving and getting criticism, of criticising constructively and of being open to such feedback. Writing treatments to show to others is an excellent way to start this process of getting feedback.

Join a writers’ group, or if you can’t find one in your area, set one up. We have published several articles on writers’ groups in *ScriptWriter* magazine.

Treatments and development work in general are an essential way of helping writers move into **new territory**, find **new solutions** for old problems, **explore** not only their characters but also their **own psychological and emotional makeup**, which inevitably plays a part in causing them to write the way they do. So, don’t limit yourself.

To demonstrate your writing style, ability, talent, dialogue - and so on - requires you to show a script. None of those things can be adequately judged from a treatment. So don’t fall for the old mistake that because you have to submit a script, you should go straight into writing it, without going first through some sort of treatment building process.

It is also important that whoever reads your work - whether it is a treatment, synopsis, first draft or final draft - should know what your **intentions** are. You don’t go to movies without knowing something about the film you have chosen to see. You don’t buy a book without knowing something about it. That information, gleaned from reviews, ads, articles and word-of-mouth, colours your attitude, and may well affect your enjoyment of the work.

So how does the reader of your treatment know what your intentions are unless you tell them. You should want their reading of your work to be as informed as possible. The letter you send with your treatment or pages, or the introductory blurb or pitch you enclose, are very important.

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It is too simplistic to say that if only you spent more time on your treatments, then you will write better scripts. But the chances are that - **assuming** you have the basic writing talent - your scripts **will** avoid many of the most common mistakes that cause us to reject over 99% of what we get sent.

These include (and I am only mentioning a few of the most fundamental ones):
- it is an unambitious idea to start with
- there is no clear central character, no protagonist
- the motivation of the central characters is not established
- there is a protagonist but an unequal antagonist, which means that the central character is never really pushed
- the plot is full of holes

Writing good treatments and being able to pitch well are two basic steps towards enabling any writer to realise what they are trying to achieve. There really are no rules, except **Don't be boring**.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that because it interests or excites you, that it will automatically excite or interest others.

The pitching exercise we will be doing is to learn to be more objective and self-critical. Lack of those two things is the most common reason for being unable to judge **why** what you have written does **not** work**.** Because other people WILL see problems in what you have written

What should the writer do when editors or producers ask for changes, at any stage of the development process?

1. Ask lots of questions during the discussions that take place before you write the treatment. Clarify their words by restating them...."Do you mean..." or "Are you saying...." are ways of doing this.
2. Make copious notes during the meeting. These will be invaluable to you later on.
3. Send an email to them confirming what was agreed that you should do.

Don't be shy! This is your career.

The ratio of what-is-produced to what-is-written is frighteningly small. Most of the scripts will never even be bought. Treatments won't solve the problem of

too much being offered for too few slots. But they will greatly increase the chances of your work being read faster, by more people and with a better response rate. Assuming - as ever - that you have enough talent.

The business is all about giving yourself an edge over other writers. Even if they are your friends!

I'm afraid I am not one of those American-style lecturers who believes that everyone can write, if you just apply yourself to it. It is possible to teach many aspects of writing, but it is not possible to teach people to have talent. And without talent you are unlikely to succeed. But without proper planning and forethought, you can suffocate your talent prematurely, in drafts of scripts, written before you have adequately thought out the story and the characters.

No discussion of treatments and why the industry needs them, would make sense without considering audiences, but from another point of view.

To recap, the treatment or step-outline is a shortened form of your story. It may have no - or little - dialogue, but it is nevertheless the story you are telling in an abbreviated form. A **full** proposal, treatment or step outline - **not the selling or pitch document** - requires all the structure that your finished work will have.

And if you accept that a full treatment is structurally the same as your book or script, then you must be able to apply the same criteria for your of **audience's** motivation - why is the audience still sitting round **your** camp-fire listening to you, and not curled up under goatskins fast asleep or procreating more children?

Long before Aristotle thought up his theory of why drama works, the favoured storytellers would have been using the three-act structure in telling their stories. Long before Aristotle, the function of stories, of myths, played a powerful part in the lives of what **we today** call primitive peoples.

Several years before his death I studied under Frank Daniel, perhaps the best teacher of script writing I have ever known. When he spoke about the three acts someone asked him about preliterate societies and their storytelling. He said that in his opinion they would have used the three act structure because it is based on the way the human mind works. The use of three acts is, at its most obvious, a reflection of beginning/middle and end.

Our minds normally operate in the present tense, with the immediate past freshly remembered and in a constant state of anticipation of the near future. It is important to writers and producers of drama to keep in mind the fact that we constantly anticipate ***what is about to happen*** by what we are currently aware of.

Please note the word **anticipation** again. It should always be in your minds, together with the word **manipulation**. These two words sum up the process

of good writing. Once you have grasped the importance of getting the audience to anticipate, you will have so much more control over them, you will begin to be able to do what you want with them.

Let me repeat, because it is so important:

It is easy to see – in a treatment - if you have the kind of scenes that will enable you to manipulate your audience. You can save yourself months of writing scenes that have to be thrown away. You must know where you are going, and - as someone once said – if you don't know where you are, how can you know where you are going?

We can seen how the structure of **BEGINNING, MIDDLE and END** relates simply to our awareness of the present, the immediate past and the immediate future.

Aristotle, as we know, analysed audience involvement with drama in three stages:

PITY, FEAR and CATHARSIS

I think that it is worth explaining this in some detail, because once you see how the reader of your proposal or treatment might relate to what you have written, or the viewer of your film might be affected by what they see and hear, you will automatically think more manipulatively as you select what to put into your treatments, and you **will** write better treatments. In order to get them to be in a state of anticipation, you have to be manipulative.

So how does music confirm this? Music creates one of its most dominant effects on listeners by virtue of the repetitive nature of the notes, the phrasing. The themes. Listen to a piece - popular or classical - that you know well, and you will find that you are anticipating **virtually** every note. You are 'hearing' it in your mind's ear before it is played. I am not talking about modern atonal music. Think, for instance, of a Beethoven Sonata, or Mozart concerto or The Beatles - that shows my age!

If there is a scratch on the record, or the CD jumps, you notice immediately. However, if you listen to a piece of music that you have **never** heard before, you will be anticipating the notes even though you do not know the piece. Perhaps you won't guess them all, but you will guess a surprising number of them.

In other words, you will be anticipating sequences of notes that you do not know, perhaps only one note ahead of the music as it is being played or virtually simultaneously. And your enjoyment is probably related to the intensity of your anticipation.

Anticipation is what makes reading and viewing enjoyable for audiences, particularly the surprises and reversals that they were not able to predict. Anticipation is the key ingredient that keeps audiences involved, as long as

they have been able to identify with the characters in the first place.

In the programme notes for the wonderful series of Beethoven Sonatas being played by Maurizio Pollini, I noticed the following:

*(Beethoven's) preference for 'happy endings' is not by any means a tendency towards kitsch, but rather a musical style akin to Schiller's philosophy of **suffering, struggle and overcoming.'***

Aristotle goes on to explain that the **plot structure is the mechanics by which the audience is given experiences that cause them pleasure**. Let me repeat that: **plot structure is the mechanics by which the audience is given experiences that cause them pleasure.** And Aristotle's simple formulation of this is … **PITY....FEAR....CATHARSIS**

Make the audience feel **pity** for a character and they identify with that character.

Then make the audience experience increasing amounts of **fear** for the character.

Finally, **release** the audience from the **tension of anticipating** the terrible things that are going to happen to that character, and the audience feels great.

In case you think that Aristotle can't be the only evidence for this theory, Ari Hiltunen, in his excellent book ARISTOTLE IN HOLLYWOOD, examines the work of Russian Folklorist Vladimir Propp, who wrote a book with the daunting title **MORPHOLOGY OF THE FOLKTALE.** He analysed over 200 folktales and discovered, apparently to his surprise, a common story-pattern to all of them.

And in Joseph Campbell's works such as **THE HERO OF A THOUSAND FACES**, the same theory is substantiated. Campbell is, like Aristotle, difficult to read. But I recommend Chris Vogler's excellent book on Campbell and mythology and storytelling : **THE WRITER'S JOURNEY.**

'Overcoming' or 'catharsis' is Beethoven's preference for 'happy endings'. It is the happy ending that audiences from time immemorial have shown preference for. A happy ending is not better, a sad ending is not worse, than the other. They are different. Don't select one without realising what you are doing, and without knowing why you are doing it.

"*The plot structure gives the audience experiences that cause them pleasure..."* it is perverse that we choose to get this pleasure by being scared in thrillers and horror films; we seek fear and simulated pain and tension in order to experience the release from that tension. We use the cinema and books and television to have experiences vicariously, to rehearse for life.

It is in the safely of our version of the primitive cave that we learn to deal with life. **[have I told them the cave analogy?]**You as writers have a part to play in that. Give us - the audience - experiences that we need, and that we want. The big question is how do you know what we want, and how do you separate that from what you want to discover, about yourself and your own life.

To reject Hollywood and American story-techniques because we don't like the values in their stories, is truly to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I feel very strongly that Europe suffers from a pathetic conservative backlash against American movies, partly because they occupy over 80% of our screens.

The fact that our audiences vote with their feet should be enough to make us respectful of their storytelling techniques. Instead we criticise their sentimentality, when they set out to be sentimental.

Let me recap briefly. To write a treatment well - even for experienced writers - involves the following:

- research
- the development of the characters
- backstories for the characters
- the setting or world of the story, which involves research too
- an idea
- the development of that idea into a plot or structured storyline

All this usually takes 50% of the total time needed to write the script, **including rewrites and polishes**.

But you will seldom ever be paid much for the treatment which is one of the main reasons writers avoid doing them properly.

If you write a really good treatment you should be able to use it to negotiate a better deal. How do you know if the treatment is that good? Unfortunately it is difficult to be the best judge of one's own work, which is why it is important to have a network of colleagues that you trust, who will be kind to you.

So you use the treatment writing process to force you to clarify your idea, establish the theme, lay out backstories for your characters, build up the **world** of the story - the locations. Each of these elements can impose important changes on the others. Each needs to be thought about and weighed up. **Only** when you have done that should you start shaping the story that started with the idea.

Writing tricks like the 3 obligatory questions are just aids to help, like rhymes to help little children learn which way to look before crossing the road. Do you know the three questions? Whose story is it? What do they want? And what stops them getting it?

Questions formatted like :"What if...." are the same. "What if a confirmed bachelor fell in love...?", "What if there is a dead body in a locked room...?", or from a recent TV movie, "BLIND WITNESS: A blind woman vows revenge on the men who broke into her home and killed her husband." The "what if?" is implicit in the log-line.

Working with treatments and step outlines in an organised way makes you ask yourself the questions that others will later ask of you or of your work. You **must** get there first and pre-empt the questions. The answers **must** be on the page, or in the pitch.

One of the other advantages of the treatment and step-outline process is that it encourages you to regard your work as **work in progress**. **Nothing** is set in concrete. I can't tell you how refreshing it is to work with writers who regard **every** draft as work in progress, **even** the final polish.

Unless your mind is open to radical alternatives you may miss the twist that will lift your OK project into something really special. That means possibly changing the central character's sex (even if it based on you), or changing their age radically. It can be a less radical change: instead of your main character being 50 years old, make them 28, instead of the victim being a baby make them a teenager, instead of the love story between two married people, make one of them single.

Don't settle for whatever you **first** think up or put down. If your idea seems **brilliant** to you, be a bit suspicious. Think of yourself standing in front of Spielberg or Fellini or whoever, telling them about your idea. Does it **still** sound so good? **Test** the idea. **Write** it down and leave it for a few days. Let it cool down. If it holds up when you look at it again, **great**.

Can you **convey** the promise of that emotional experience in your treatment. It is not that difficult. Treatments are all about appearance. However, if you are asked for **more details**, be prepared either to **give** them, or say confidently that you will do it in the first draft of the script.

Another easy way to make your treatment read better is to change from the past tense to the present tense. Your treatments will gain immediacy. Instead of "*Peter was scared..."* put *"Peter is scared..."*. It makes a difference.

You are **not** expected - in the first draft of a treatment that you have written - to have worked **everything** out. Or if the producer **seems** to expect it, make it clear that to work it **all** out will take **several** drafts and **more** time than he or she is paying for. But make sure that you **do** have the time you need to do the drafts.

This means that if you think you can do them in three weeks, ask for four or five weeks in your **contract**. **Always** give yourself a margin. Having delivered the draft you should still continue **thinking** about your characters

and the plot, you should still **go on developing it**. Ideally scripts and stories develop **organically**. Ideas thrown in from other people **can** help. But your development should stem from within the core idea and from within your understanding of your characters and their world.

There are other 'tricks' that can help. Recently a client of mine, writing her first script, was making good progress, but said that she couldn't find the voice of her central character, even though she was on the third draft of the script. I suggested that she write a 5 or 10 page monologue in which the central character tells us the story of the film from **that character's** point of view. You can do this with several characters. And do it before you write the script, as part of the treatment.

It is an old trick and usually works. It is also worth doing if you are being paid to do a very full treatment with detailed character biographies. Do a one or two page monologue for **each** of the central characters. It will probably make your treatment come alive and stand out. The producer will know the sound of the characters' voices, and that will make it easier to identify with them.

I've mentioned that proposals or treatments – on the one hand - and selling documents – on the other - are different. They **can** be the same. But a document whose function is to **sell** the idea to someone who is interested in money rather than **story**, needs to be different from a document whose function is to help you explore the inner workings of your story, and the inner motivations of your characters, or to persuade a commissioning editor, broadcaster or film fund that you are the writer for the job they have to offer.

The important thing is not to **confuse** the documents or the purposes. However, towards the end of the development process you should have a treatment that should mirror your projected film. It is a statement of intent. It **is** difficult to do this before you have written the script. But that is what these two days are all about - how to **really know** your story and characters before you start writing.

If you can produce a document that comes across as being a mini-version of the film, it will create confidence in you. And that will sell you faster than a recommendation from Spielberg. If a treatment has a three-act structure visible, it means that you know what a three-act structure is and how it works. You are **already** an asset. It makes you attractive as a writer, because most treatments and scripts don't show their structure clearly.

And if it has strong characters, with individual voices, in a really dramatic situation that draws us in, , that engages us emotionally, then it will be an unusual proposal.

A treatment doesn't **have** to be in three-acts. But it **does have to have a structure**, which should be visible. And in a treatment it is easier to see it than in a script. That's why you can put in the headings for the act breaks into your treatment. If it is an episode for a TV series it might have 4 or 5 acts. Put

them in. If your central character is **easy** to identify with as well, the document will suggest to the reader that it **is** going to work on screen, no **matter** what the subject is.

American stories are **not** more successful in movies because they are **American** stories, but because they are **told** in a certain way. You don't have to **reinvent** the wheel to make a better car.

As I suggested for the pitching sessions, where you prepare a long pitch, then a shorter one, and finally a very short one, **so** you can do with treatments. Do **several** for the same story. They can be from one paragraph to 50 or more pages. Once you get to over 20 pages, I suggest that you change the format from a short-story prose style to a step outline. This way, you create the final blueprint for the script - only the dialogue is missing.

But a detailed step-outline for a film must always show the act breaks. Step-outlines are essentially scene breakdowns. Imagine you are watching the film. Briefly describe every scene. Check where the scene and act breaks come. Audiences like the end of act one - or the point at which they really know what the film is really about - to come in the first 20 to 25 minutes. That is what they are used to and it provides the right balance between set up, complications and crisis or denouement. Or pity / fear / catharsis.

What the step-outlines, 3 X 5 cards or story-telling computer software let you do is **see** the **whole** story in brief. You can **more** easily identify and assess the peaks of tension and the slow bits, the climaxes and reversals. It ensures that you check to see that you have got them! You can get a sense of **pace**, that **elusive** quality that usually **only** is realised once the director does his or her work.

You have probably also heard that every scene must move the story forward. If a scene doesn't contribute something towards this it should be cut, even if it is a scene you **absolutely** love. Especially if it is a scene you absolutely love. "**You must kill the darlings."**

So unless you do a step-outline, how can you check all this **before** writing the script? The step-outline is the best place to test this, to check on the contribution of **every** scene to the telling of your story. You can see exactly when each important character is introduced, whether they have been sufficiently set up, whether the antagonist is strong enough and comes in early enough.

You check the visualness of your proposed script by seeing what you have done for the eyes of the audience, and what you have done for the ears. In most features - not all - the former is more important.

Whether you are writing on spec or on commission, you should **always** do a step-outline before starting the script. But when you are commissioned be **sure** that you and the producer are in sync. Are you agreed about trying to

make the same film? Get **approval** of the treatment before starting the step-outline, and approval of the step outline before starting the script, otherwise you may end up writing many scenes which will have to go.

A good editor or producer will be happy to talk you through the steps of the step-outline even if it sketchy , to consider the pacing, so now you are not so much writing it to find out **how** to tell the story, **but** - after the discussion with the producer - you are writing it to **reflect** what the two of you **have agreed on**.

If you have to work completely alone, you are at a disadvantage. Always try to share your writing with others, and be willing to give them feedback on their work.

Most people think that in a short treatment you **can't** convey a great deal. You **can**, however, convey what is there with conviction and passion. And you can convey **tone, texture, mood and atmosphere**. If you have been asked for a one page proposal, it is, in effect, a selling document. I would still argue you are better off having the **one page** reveal **as far as possible** the structure of the story, and mention the mood, atmosphere etc. in your covering letter. If we have time we can talk about submission letters.

So, a proposal or treatment is a promise to deliver something more detailed later on. Be careful of submitting **in the first** place a step-outline. This may not **read** easily. It tends to be staccato in style, and for someone who doesn't know your way of working or the story and its characters, it may not be a convincing document. You may need to do two versions - one with more cosmetic touches and a better prose-style.

If they were to read it after having read the treatment or **sales** document you have lovingly prepared, then they should be deeply impressed. These two documents have a close relationship; but they do have different functions.

Never lose sight, as you write the treatment, **why** you are writing it and **for whom** you are writing it. Never forget that audiences **want** to have emotional experiences, not watch **other** people having them.

Writing a treatment should be regarded in a similar way to writing a script. It is a **lot** of work; it requires **many** rewrites before anybody important sees it; you need to know a **great** deal about the characters (especially their backstories, which do not even come into the treatment except obliquely); they need to **arc** properly; the story must have an **easy to grasp** plot or storyline, and so on.

This whole process, everything you research and write before you start the script, enables you to make sure that the **whole** is greater than the sum of the parts. It is no good having a great idea, great characters, wonderful locations, but it doesn't hang together. It takes time to get the disparate parts to mesh together in one flowing movement.

Being able to write a good proposal does **not** mean that you will write a good script.

Writing a good script doesn't mean you can write good proposals!

But, writing good proposals will always get you more opportunities to write scripts!

There are a few other points worth making about writing proposals:

1. Too often treatments or the letters that accompany them concentrate on the opening scenes, rather than demonstrate that the writer knows how to get through the difficult and long middle section, and the very important climax. It is rare to see a treatment which concentrates on the cinematic ending. It would be refreshing!

2. There is often little attention paid to the ***weighting*** of the subplots. In fact subplots are often not mentioned at all. In a short treatment it is difficult to clarify this aspect of the proposed script. If the treatment is a selling document, written before much work has gone into the project, the likelihood is that the subplots do not even exist yet. But the reader of the document may expect you to know more than you do.

What you can do to overcome this problem, is to state in the covering letter that the treatment is an early draft and that before you spend the time you **intend** to, developing it in depth, you wanted to find out if the reader was interested in the subject or the genre in general. You would also be happy to come in to discuss some of the options that a story like this offers if they are interested or you will writ a longer treatment.

3. Have a relationship – you should always be able to tell a story using two separate approaches: the plot and the charting of the central relationship, the former usually works with males, the latter with females. Since you need both in your movie, you need both story approaches integrated into one seamless story. We need to root for someone we identify with.

Remember, subplots often have the function of providing the audience with intimate, personal and psychological insights into the characters, who may be involved in a caper or thriller. It really helps suggest that your script will have some depth if the reader of the treatment knows that there will be subplots.

4. It is difficult in a treatment to show tension and suspense, although it is worth trying to do so. If you state that there will be tension, the description of the actions or the situation (tension does not necessarily have to come from action) should still indicate it, even without your statement.

5. It is difficult to demonstrate **themes** easily in a short treatment, which is a

good reason to **state** what the theme is in your covering letter or the notes that precede the actual treatment. Why make the reader guess?

LET ME FINISH WITH SOME **FINAL THOUGHTS** from some of the best teachers:

Firstly, Michael Hauge, whose book WRITING SCREENPLAYS THAT SELL is the one I would use if I was only going to use one:

This is the ultimate advice on How To Write a Treatment in one easy lesson:

*...enable a **sympathetic** character ... to overcome a series of **increasingly** difficult, **seemingly** insurmountable obstacles...and achieve a **compelling** desire.....*

William Goldman, in his new book WHICH LIE DID I TELL described a good story as "…something with an interesting premise that builds logically to a satisfying and surprising conclusion."

Then from Lew Hunter, doyen of teachers at UCLA:

*....the **idea** is the most important, the **story** the most difficult, and the **script** the easiest. Scripts are...simply the stories played out on paper. If the story is **badly** developed, that will always be reflected in the script. If the story **works** and the script is not wonderful, the **script** will need rewriting, but those hours are not nearly as terrorising to a professional as major restructuring. ... **Why** the terror? Principally because it was such a painstaking work to get the outline structured **enough** to get to the script stage.*

Hunter is also responsible for the great quote:

*In **life**, things happen one after another. In structure one thing happens **because** of another. Structure is **that** simple and **that** hard.*

And finally he has this quote:

*[proposals] need not be funny for a comedy series. Or exciting to read for adventure, nor fearful for drama. [proposals] need to show the structure of the story and have the promise of maximum comedy, adventure or drama. **Promise** is the magic outline word.*

I think that is a good point on which to end! But just last thought: if you have done some or all the work suggested in this session, and THEN you write your pitch document, do you think that it would be better than if you try to write one speculatively to see what kind of story you may be able to come up with?