

The Script Savant Newsletter

#005

YOUR FIRST PAGE ISN'T AWESOME

Blaise Pascal

The heart has its reasons which reason knows not

Your First Page Isn't Awesome

A good reader does not need an entire script to know if a person can write. The first page will either capture the reader or have them looking for an excuse to trash the script.

The most important page of your script is that first page. In that page, you need to draw in and intrigue the reader with the promise of an emotionally rewarding story. The worse thing a writer can do is bore and not connect with the reader. The reader will put it down.

The first page primary job is to convince the reader to turn the page. To do this:

- have a question that the reader needs answering - **mystery**
- reveal something unexpected - **unexpected**
- give the reader a reason to care - **empathy**

What the reader should learn from that first page:

- **introduce protagonist and/or antagonist** - who are we going to root for or against
- **connect with the genre** - horror, sci-fi, comedy, action, drama, etc.
- **clarify the story world** - where and when does the story take place
- **introduce conflict** - conflict equals emotions – draw out reader's emotions
- **set the tone** - sarcastic, suspenseful, dark, humor, etc.

What you must have in your first page:

- correct formatting - correct use of screenplay elements
- spelling and punctuation - check every sentence for spelling & grammar
- write in 'Present Tense' & 'Active Voice' - don't write 'Past Tense' & 'Passive Voice'
- imaginative word use - don't use boring, repetitive common words
- good use of white space - don't intimidate with dense writing
- promise of an emotionally rewarding story - characters do actions & dialogue that connect
- original action & dialogue - don't write what we've seen or heard before
- can reader follow the story - don't write a confusing, convoluted narrative
- no lazy dialogue - no small-talk, no clichés, no on-the-nose dialogue
- avoid repetition of words - replace common words with original replacements
- don't bore the reader - write every line to excite and engage the reader

If you accomplish these then the reader will continue reading.

Here is the first page of one of my scripts along with Title, Genre, and Logline.

Title:

P.E.T.A. – People Eating Tasty Animals **Genre** *Dark Comedy/Horror*

Logline

Dark comedy melds with deadly horror in a love story, as our protagonist slaughters enemies on PETA's short list in ever-more bizarre ways, while completely oblivious to his own actions

FADE IN:

As Credits roll...

Haunting music plays over a Montage of cattle, poultry, pork, fish, hunting, lobster harvesting, pet mills, and exotic birds suffering at the hands of man. (1)

EXT. LONDON/PROMENADE – DAY (2)

A banner across “Big Ben Tower” proclaims “Guy Fawkes Day.” LONDONERS and TOURISTS, many in costume and wearing masks, spill across the promenade in celebration.

A festive scene of PEOPLE celebrating along the promenade, on a sunny day.

ROBERT LONG (30s), a large grim brutish man ambles along in a Guy Fawkes mask. (3)

EXT. CONFECTION STAND – DAY

Robert SMASHES his hand on a table, scattering a flock of feeding birds. (4)

ROBERT

Fucking birds.

He takes a seat and savors an order of fish and chips before checking his watch and moving toward the 25 “London Eye” (Giant Ferris Wheel). (5) (6)

INT./EXT. LONDON EYE/OBSERVATION CAPSULE – DAY

Robert glances at his watch and observes the timing of the Giant Ferris Wheel. He steps aside to let a FAMILY board the current observation capsule. (7)

As the next capsule swings to a halt, Robert steps aboard.

INT. LONDON EYE/OBSERVATION CAPSULE – DAY

Approaching its apex, Robert steps to the observation window, facing ‘Big Ben’. He glances outside as his watch beeps. (8) (9)

A BOY (8) rushes up and pushes his face against the observation window.

BOY
Is that the queen?

From an arch window above the clock the QUEEN holds up one of her CORGIS and waves to the crowd.

The title suggests comedy

If we read the logline we have the – **(promise of an emotionally rewarding story)**

If we were given the genre we know what to expect – **(horror/comedy)**

Comments

- (1) music & visuals suggest ominous horror **(genre)**
- (2) London – orients us to the location we are in the world **(where – clarify story world)**
- (3) first named character suggests he's important – he's hiding behind a mask – secretive – his description of being brutish suggests he's not the protagonist perhaps **(antagonist)**
- (4) his anger implies he's unstable – he hates animals - suggesting he's the **(antagonist)**
- (5) we wonder why he's looking at his watch – a **(mystery)**
- (6) the 'London Eye' is modern so the story takes place in the current time **(when – clarify story world)**
- (7) looks at his watch again – what is he looking at **(tension - mystery)**
- (8) his watch beeps – what's supposed to occur – **(expectation – tension - mystery)**
- (9) general comment – no Passive Voice – no Past Tense - all Action is in **(Present Tense & Active Voice)**
- (10) general comment – **(correct screenplay formatting)**
- (11) general comment – breaking up Action into small blocks - **(use of white space)**
- (12) general comment – scattering, savors, brutish, smashes, festive, ambles, pushes - **(creative word use)**
- (13) general comment – at this point the story is told in a linear manner - **(easy to follow the story)**
- (14) general comment – most dialogue is replaced by action - **(no lazy dialogue)**
- (15) general comment – tourists wearing Guy Fawkes masks, riding 'London Eye' **(original action)**
- (16) general comment – the mystery, tension and clear to follow script makes the first page - **(not boring)**
- (17) general comment – nothing happened when the watch beeped – **(unexpected)**
- (18) general comment – introduced conflict by slamming hand on table, promise of conflict if the boy sees something he associates with our antagonist **(sets the tone of this character)**
- (19) general comment – limited number of characters on the first page: a named character – Robert - a Family
- a Boy **(keep number of characters to the minimum so the reader can remember them)**
- (20) general comment – dialogue is short and to the point – no clichés – no small-talk – no on-the-nose dialogue **(only supply needed dialogue)**
- (21) general comment – varied use of words – didn't repeat common words **(evocative word use)**
- (22) general comment – we have empathy for the animals in the opening scene and for the birds – no empathy for Robert **(emotionally connect with reader)**
- (23) nearly all dialogue replaced by action **(replace dialogue with action when possible)**

Still Missing On First Page

comedy genre – on page one we don't get a sense of comedy

protagonist – we don't know who the protagonist is

More Comments on First Page

- The story starts with haunting music over a montage of man's brutal treatment of animals.
(intriguing - attempts to draw our interest since we know it's a Horror/Dark Comedy - e.g., opening credits of 'World War Z' has a similar opening - evokes an uneasy feeling)
- We recognize London's "Big Ben," "Westminster Palace," and "The London Eye."
(orients us to our location and time - we see our story world is current day London.)
- A "Guy Fawkes" banner hangs from "Big Ben." "Guy Fawkes Day" was a failed attempt at

blowing up the “House of Lords“ in 1605.

(suggests similar might occur - suspense builds since we know the genre)

- A large brutish grim man in Guy Fawkes mask lingers around a crowded promenade and harasses a flock of hungry birds.
(Robert Long is given a proper name which suggests he’s a significant character)
- His harsh treatment of birds suggests, live and let live might not be his motto - we don’t like him.
- Robert checks his watch and moves on toward the ‘London Eye’
(tension builds - whatever he’s waiting for will happen soon)
- Outside the ‘London Eye’ he checks his watch again.
(Robert’s waiting for something – suspense builds)
- Robert lets a family board and fill up the current gondola capsule.
(what’s he’s waiting for is time-dependent - tension builds - whatever he’s waiting for will happen soon)
- Robert enters the next gondola and moves to an observation window. His watch beeps.
(whatever event he’s waiting for should occur now – suspense continues to build)

PDF VERSIONS OF NEWSLETTERS

How To Pitch Your Story

https://thescriptsavant.com/newsletters/TheScriptSavant_Newsletter_001.pdf

Mastering Creativity In Storytelling

https://thescriptsavant.com/newsletters/TheScriptSavant_Newsletter_002.pdf

The Art Of Collaboration

https://thescriptsavant.com/newsletters/TheScriptSavant_Newsletter_003.pdf

Your First Dozen Pages Isn’t Awesome

https://thescriptsavant.com/newsletters/TheScriptSavant_Newsletter_004.pdf

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