

PITCHCRAFT

TOP 10 PRO TIPS



The Secret Art of Writing Killer Director Treatments to Win Work, Attract Success and Crush Your Competition

*Got a treatment to write and don't know where to start –
grab this checklist and a coffee and you're good to go!*

1 Get started!

Procrastination is a five-syllable word for sloth.
Fuck motivation. Don't wait to be inspired. That's for amateurs. You're a pro.
Make a start. Motivation is only ever guaranteed to show up one time - and that's
when you're in action. START! NOW!

2 Read the VO first...

Absolutely the first thing I do. Every. Single. Time.
Sums up the whole communication. Nothing gets my head around a TVC faster.
Sometimes there isn't one or it's missing. If so chase it down. You don't want to
discover that you've got no VO and no idea what the spot's about mid-weekend when
the agency's uncontactable.

3 Use Post It notes...

Post It notes are the result of millions of years of evolution to contain one
single thought or idea. Write one on each. Grab a pad - write a bunch - drink
coffee - write more - go for a walk - write more - space out - write more - BOOM -
now you've got enough to get started.

4 Let the reference do the work

Now you've wrapped your head around what the film's about, it's time to ransack the
internet for reference. Hunting the perfect pix is primal. It can turn into a pro
level treasure hunt with a massive spike in serotonin when you find the perfect
image or clip. That's why you need to have a clear focus first. Looking for
reference is easy work. It doesn't need a high degree of cerebral firepower. That's
why I reserve it for afternoons/evenings coz I do my best thinking in the morning.
Find out what works for you and adapt accordingly.

5 Love/Hate

This gets to the heart of the matter.
What do you love or hate about these boards?
What do I love about this script?
What do I hate about the script?
What works here?
What doesn't work here?
What is the biggest single problem that I have got to solve?
How am I going to solve it?
The answers to the last two questions are what you should open your treatment with.

6 Impact – Communication – Persuasion

A strong advertising story has three components: impact, communication and persuasion.

Impact is noise: like an explosion or a scream. It gets attention.

FUCK!!!

That's impact.

Communication lays out the offer. FUCK!!! THIS SOAP IS AMAZING! That's communication.

Persuasion answers “what’s in it for me?” This is where the magic happens.

FUCK!!! THIS SOAP IS AMAZING! AND IT’S HALF PRICE! Persuasion, a reason to buy now.

Most advertising is just impact and communication: so why should I care? Or communication and persuasion, bland product pitches whistled into the wind. It goes unnoticed. You need to address all three elements in your treatment: impact, persuasion and communication. Impact is the opening sequence, the visual style, edit, tempo and look of the film. Persuasion comes through in the craft, casting, cinematography and slick audio. Communication is born of structure: organising the ad in a way that’s simple to digest. Good advertising is simple and clear. Same with pitches.

7 Beginning – Middle – End

I start with the middle first, then the end and finally the beginning. Any project or enterprise can break down into a beginning, a middle and an end. The three-act structure has been around since forever... or since 3,000 BC when the Greeks dreamt it up. It’s found in films, plays, poetry, novels, comic books, short stories, video games, TVCs and treatments. Though appearing simple, the three-act structure has proven to be a valuable weapon in the arsenal of any treatment creator. Yes, there are alternatives to telling a story. But the three-act structure is an accepted and successful sure-fire method.

Mine are:

Beginning – Vision, Approach, Idea

Middle – Mood/Tone, Cinematography, Casting/Performance, Action

End – Art Direction, Location, Product Shot, Wrap

8 Relisten to the con call

I always do this. A lot of the time I transcribe the con call. You will always hear something the second time that you missed the first time round. Also when you listen again, you catch the subtext. What are the key themes they constantly referring to? What are they worried about? What will the winning treatment look like? Your subconscious mind will be a little fuller with solutions. Plus you’ll get a fresher perspective on what the agency and client want from this board... and from you.

9 The first draft is always shit

Kudos to Brene Brown on this one. It's something copywriters know instinctively but she made it infamous - the SHITTY FIRST DRAFT or SFD. When it comes to writing treatments, it's the version I create from initial thinking, usually a hurried one. It lacks style but has structure. Writing the SFD decreases any fears or anxiety I may have about the project. Pushing through it makes me feel more resilient. Revolution comes in the rewrite. Once that's done I feel great to have something down... to have broken the back of the brief... to have almost cracked it. Then I relax and do something else to clear my mind. Mindfulness is a practice that helps develop awareness. That creates a bigger space between thought and action. It provides a gap in my thinking so I can calm down and challenge my assumptions about the spot. It provides another opportunity during the treatment process to look at the film with new eyes. The next step is to polish it and add style over the substance. Writing is rewriting.

10 Write the first bit last

Here's something I learned doing my MBA. As a team with my fellow students, we'd all do separate parts of the business plan. I always nobly volunteered to write the executive summary. Why? Because everyone else has to do their work first. Then all I had to do was summarise what they suggested and throw some spin on it. The executive summary or intro section of your 4-page, 10-page, or 20-page treatment is the version you'd give to the ECD or lead client while they're waiting for an Uber. Think of it as a 15 second cut down of the entire treatment. It should sharpen your thinking so you can poke them in the eye with it.

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