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Log Line Examples – Good and Bad

A log line is a one or two sentence description of a film that is designed to show the elements that comprise the interesting essence of the movie. It should mention those few elements in the film that will make an audience want to see the film. In other words, it's what makes **you** interested in the film. Here are some examples, both good and bad. I've listed the films' directors and dates of release to give you a sense of period, but a good log line does not need these facts to work.

AFTERGLOW (Alan Rudolph, 1997) – Two unhappy couples cross paths.

BAD -- What exactly is it in this film which makes these couples interact, and what makes them interesting to watch?

ALL THE RIGHT MOVES (Michael Chapman, 1983) – A Pennsylvania steel-town ambitious and hot headed high school coach tries to spoil a football hero's scholarship dream.

GOOD – This gives a fairly clear sense of what is at stake and what the concerns of the movie are (character).

AMARCORD (Federico Fellini, 1974) – A young man, a stand-in for the director Fellini, romantically views life in the 1930s Italian village of the director's youth.

GOOD – This film will be about nostalgia, told lyrically, with less of a plot than an eye for the past.

BIG NIGHT (Stanley Tucci, 1996) – Two very different brothers promote their struggling 1950s New Jersey Italian restaurant by inviting Louis Prima and his band to take part in a sumptuous dinner there.

GOOD – The plot line seems to hinge on the characters. There is a story through line.

BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY (Clint Eastwood, 1995) – An Iowa housewife, stuck in her routine, must choose between true romance and the needs of her family.

BASICALLY GOOD – Gives a sense of the Streep character and the story but ignores the Eastwood character needs and his enigmatic nature.

DENNIS THE MENACE (Nick Castle, 1993) – Comic strip moppet plays pranks on Mr. Wilson.

BAD – Though it is clear how shallow this film is, there is no attempt to give the reader a flavor of what makes the hijinks interesting or different.

EDWARD SCISSORHANDS (Tim Burton, 1990) – A suburban mother brings home a freaky young man who has scissors instead of hands.

SO-SO – Though this certainly describes the start of the film, it does little to describe the film's tone or central stranger in a strange land message of the film.

FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE (Sergio Leone, 1965) – A man with no name and a man with a mission hunt a Mexican bandit for different reasons.

GOOD – A taut description of two characters, their conflict and their mission.

GRADUATE (Mike Nichols, 1967) - A college graduate, home for the summer, has an affair with the wife of his father's business partner, then falls in love with her daughter.

BAD – Describes the plot outline but fails to give the setting (What time frame? The 60s mean something in terms of Hoffman's revolt) or any sense of the central conflict of the film. What are the interesting conflicts? Who is this graduate (we need adjectives), what does the Bancroft character want?

HYPE! (Doug Pray, 1996) – Filmmaker Doug Pray chronicles commercialism's infiltration of Seattle's rock-music scene.

OKAY – The central theme of this documentary is laid out, though there is a lack of detail which makes for a lack of insight into how this film works. BETTER IS THE FOLLOWING —>

HYPE! (Doug Pray, 1996) – Smart, thoughtful look at the Seattle grunge-rock scene and the way in which commercialism screwed it up. Interviews with all the key players, some terrific music, and a candid piece of work.

GOOD – A much better description which gives a sense of the energy of the piece.

LEAN ON ME (John Avildsen, 1989) – A tough principal takes revolutionary measures to clean up a notoriously dangerous inner-city New Jersey high school.

GOOD – Sets up his characters and conflict. A second sentence might give a sense of some other characters or the style of the piece.

LONE STAR (John Sayles, 1996) – A small town Texas sheriff, despite warnings not to, investigates a convoluted case, when a brutal predecessor's remains turn up 40 years after he was supposedly run out of town.

GOOD – This gives the sense of story, its twisted plot turns, and some of the character of the sheriff.

MIDNIGHT COWBOY (John Schlesinger, 1969) – Naïve Joe Buck arrives in New York City to make his fortune as a hustler, but soon strikes up an unlikely friendship with the first scoundrel he falls prey to.

GOOD – Gives a clear picture of character and goals, the plot line and some sense of place.

RUSHMORE – A precocious private high school student whose life revolves around his school competes with its most famous and successful alumnus for the affection of a first grade teacher.

GOOD – Sets up the characters and conflicts. We could use a sense of the film's comedic style though. It also might help to mention that the two characters become friends at some point in the film.

THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS (Alexander Mackendrick, 1957) – A press agent, hungry to get ahead, is pushed by a ruthless columnist to do cruel and evil things, and is eventually caught in the web of lies that he has created.

GOOD – Tells what is important to the characters, their goals and who they are. An indication of the film's tone might be helpful, the film could be a comedy or a tough drama from this description.