

Premise:

The premise of a screenplay is the basic, overarching concept that drives the plot. As written, it is clear and concise, and should be no shorter than a sentence or longer than a paragraph.

Some bad examples are: Othello - *Unchecked jealousy leads to death*; Titanic - *Love conquers all, physically and spiritually*; The Silence of the Lambs - *Courage destroys evil*.

(source: Wikipedia)

As you can see, these examples distill the stories down to their core abstract themes and concepts, and even give a sense of the ending of the story, or the moral. For the purposes of this class, try blending the abstract with some concrete descriptions so that we get a better sense of your specific story and how it will be told.

Example: Hung - *A former high school baseball legend turned middle-aged phys ed teacher learns to make a profit off his biggest asset*.

What information is given in this premise that is lacking in the three from Wikipedia? What can we glean about character, theme, tone and writing style? What question does the “Hung” example raise in the minds of a perspective audience? Do you think it is more effective to give details or to be more conceptual?

What are some different ways that you can present your premise?

1.

2.

3.

Synopsis:

The synopsis is a summary of the major **beats** of your screenplay from beginning, middle, to end. Theme, and tone should be reflected in your synopsis, but not stated overtly. Instead, a synopsis introduces the reader to your lead characters (especially the protagonist), their want, their conflict, obstacles to achieving their goal, and how their conflict is resolved. It is written in the chronological order of how events will unfold on screen (which does not need to be linear), and should include specific/detailed information of what will be seen and heard on screen – everything from lead characters (name in CAPS the first time they are introduced), to the time, specific locations, and major conflicts. Be as specific as possible – avoid generalities! You can use dialogue, especially to reveal character, but please do so only sparingly. Always write a synopsis in *third person present tense*. This is how screenplays are written, plus it keeps up the momentum of the reading, and also it helps you avoid going into too much backstory.

Think of a synopsis as a fleshed out outline for an expository essay. Start with your thesis, or in this case the premise, and build from there. Each paragraph of your synopsis will have its own “thesis” – refer back to your notes on ACTS for what the “thesis” of each act should be. It will help you the writer, and also the reader if you layout the paragraphs by their corresponding acts with the midpoint at the middle of your second paragraph. Try laying out your four major plot points, like bullet points. Then fill in the gaps with your wonderful prose. Remember that in plotting your screenplay, A *causes* B which in turn *causes* C, and if those are your bullet points, then all the lovely little details you have imagined are what fleshes out what is happening between A, B, and C.

One last note: Your synopsis is not carved in stone! Instead it is like a preliminary sketch of the story you are going to write. Your story will change as you mull the specifics over in your head, have a new spark of inspiration, and especially when you are doing the actual writing (which never goes quite to plan). So have fun with it, stay loose, and always always remember that we are not expecting perfection – this is just an exercise!