

CRACKING YARNS

30 QUESTIONS TO ASK A SCREENPLAY

GUT REACTION

1. Did you enjoy reading it? Or were you constantly looking at the page numbers and thinking, “Are we there yet?” Were you moved by the ending? By anything?

CONCEPT

2. Does the film have a big, original idea? What is it?
3. Who is the protagonist? Who drives the story?
4. Who is the hero? Who is most changed? Who takes decisive action at the Climax?
5. What does the protagonist want? What is the External Goal? Is it a clear “finish line”?
6. What's stopping them from getting it? Why is it difficult? Who are the antagonists?
7. What's at stake? Are the stakes high enough to keep us interested?
8. Is the logline compelling?
9. Is it a strong concept? Does it create a sense of anticipation? Will anyone go see this film? How could it be marketed? Is its budget reasonable given its potential audience?

GENRE

10. Is it a genre film? If so, does it meet the audience's expectations of the genre? If not, will they hail it as a new landmark in cinema or throw popcorn at the screen?

STORY WORLD

11. Has the writer created a unique and authentic story world? Is it a place the audience will want to spend time?

CHARACTERS

12. Is the protagonist/hero richly characterised? What adjectives describe them? Do they have contradictions? Are they “very” anything? Are their traits revealed through conflict?
13. Are they engaging? Which scene makes us connect with the protagonist/hero?
14. What is the hero’s character flaw? Which scene in Act 1 reveals their flaw to us? Are they blind to their flaw?
15. Is the antagonist a worthy match for the protagonist/hero?

STRUCTURE – ACT 1

16. Is there a clear inciting incident/call to adventure? Does it happen early enough (preferably before page 25) or were you getting bored waiting for something to happen?
17. Does the hero want this “adventure” or is it a karmic challenge (ie the last thing they want)? Will it test the hero’s flaw?
18. Does the Act 1 Turning Point create a sense that the story is now truly under way? Is the hero committed to the goal? Does it pose a dramatic question we want to have answered? Does it happen early enough (preferably before page 25)?

STRUCTURE – ACT 2

19. Does the protagonist now actively pursue their goal or “Want” against stiff opposition?
20. As well as the throughline where the hero pursues their external goal or Want, is there a character/subplot that develops the hero’s inner “Need”?
21. Is the hero confronted with their flaw, generally by their antagonist, around the midpoint (page 50-60)?
22. Does the story escalate across Act 2, or is it episodic, with each sequence having little or no dramatic consequences for the following sequences?
23. What is the Crisis at the end of Act 2? Does it force the Hero to their darkest hour? Are they faced with a dilemma that where they must choose btw want and need? Do we feel a sense of unbearable tension and desperately want to see how it’s to be resolved?

STRUCTURE – ACT 3

24. At the Act 3 climax, does the hero face their ultimate test? Do they face their greatest antagonist?
25. Does the hero act to resolve the situation? Or are they saved by external forces? Do they have to make a sacrifice (possibly giving up their Want to get their Need)?
26. Does the hero prove to us through their actions that they've been transformed? Are they able to do something here they could not have done in Act 1?
27. Is it an emotionally satisfying ending? Do you feel a sense of catharsis or release at the Climax? Are you moved by their decisive and transformative action?

DIALOGUE

28. Does the dialogue sound authentic? Or is the character just a mouthpiece for the writer? Does it create drama or is it just talk? Is there too much exposition (description of backstory or events that happen off-screen? If there is voiceover, does it enhance or detract from the drama?

PREMISE

29. What is the dramatic or moral premise? What does the writer have to say? Does the script dramatise two alternative points of view? Does the drama “prove” the writer’s point of view?

RECOMMENDATION

30. Would you “Recommend” the project or “Pass”? Are the script’s failings fixable? Would you make the film if you had to mortgage your house to do it?