



DIPLOMA IN DIGITAL FILM

DDF 204 – Screenwriting

Week 12: Common Problems

This week I want to discuss some of the common problems that I have noticed that students have, and offer some solutions.

It's coming out too short.

This is by far the most common problem students have. In fact I would go so far to say that *most* students get this problem. With the assignment you have you may notice this in regard to the length of the first act, but you will have to take my word for it in regard to the later material. Students writing a full length screenplay often get to about 65 pages and discover that they don't have enough material. 65 pages of standard format script should average out to 65 minute of finished film, roughly, and that is too long for a short film, but not long enough to be a feature. It's a very unfortunate length. I know. My first film *Betaville* is 65 minutes long.

The problem is usually caused by either or both of the following:

- ***Not enough obstacles in the path of the main character***
- ***Not enough development of sub plots***
(For more information on subplots see this week's reading)

If there are ***too few obstacles*** in the path of the main character they will achieve their goal, and we can all go home. Make it harder. Make it so that in solving one problem they create a new problem. Make each new problem harder (see the next section). Make sure that there is always a problem to solve, so that even as one problem is solved another different one is rearing its head.

If you can't think of any more problems for you main character, try cutting their legs off.

In terms of ***sub-plots***, the obvious one is romance. If you are writing a war story or a horror, who is you main character in love with (or not in love with)? If you are writing a romance, who are your minor characters in love with (or not)?

Sub plots can also help to drive the main plot forward – in *Belief* Mel, the main character, is in love with Josh. When she reveals her feelings for him, he rejects her, and she runs away. This means that both of them are stumbling around in the woods in the dark at night – just where I wanted them. Also, as I mentioned earlier, this rejection is a mechanism to create identification. Sub plots will not only add length to your screenplay, but richness as well.