

Improving Your Logline

By [Max Timm](#) October 21, 2020

<https://www.networkisa.org/screenwriting-articles/view/improving-your-logline>

Logline Breakdown Process

Hello from Max Timm, the ISA's Director of Education, VP of Development with Creative Screenwriter Prods, and coach/consultant for The Story Farm! What you are about to consume is information, education, tips, and exercises that should help you improve the quality and effectiveness of your logline. We're in this together, and it's why the ISA is offering this free sampling of coursework from my online screenwriting class, [The Craft Course](#). Enjoy and take it all in – it will help you take your logline to the next level.

Getting started:

Loglines can be a bit of an enigma for most writers. How long should they be? How much of the story do I show in the logline? How are they structured? There are more questions, of course, but we're hoping this breakdown will help answer as many of your questions as possible. Our best advice? You can do this as long as you take it seriously and understand the logline's importance.

The industry's perspective on loglines is pretty universal in spite of the medium (ie. TV, film, short-form). That perspective? They're incredibly important and essential to the selling process. If you have any intention of getting a manager, producer, agent, or any other kind of entertainment executive interested in reading your script... yes, the logline is extremely important. As an example, the ISA's Development Slate takes talented writers under their wing and not only helps them with their material, but submits their material to industry pros around town. The first iteration of that outreach - the first line of defense, if you will - is purely through a list of loglines.

Rarely, if ever, will an executive immediately trust a complete script and start reading it without some form of an introduction to its story. That introduction, folks, is the logline. So let's get yours in top notch shape.

Let's start with the basics:

The logline presents four primary elements:

- Establishes a character with a problem
- Proves genre
- Shows the unique hook
- Provides the situational recurring moment

In a way, I could end the lesson right there. If those four elements are not in your logline, you're doing it wrong. Plain and simple. BUT... I am taking it upon myself to help you write the best damn logline possible for your particular project.

TV WRITERS: take note, this is important

Loglines are not only for feature writers! In a way, and really, a very big way, your job in the realm of writing a logline is even more important. It's more important because you need to not only sell the idea behind a pilot, but the first season, and the full series. So, at the very least, when creating your series bible, you will need those three loglines at the very beginning of your bible. This will prove to any executive that you have not only one pilot figured out, but an entire series... and it is the series as a whole that an executive will want. Not just your pilot.

There are four primary components to any story: Flawed Hero, Secondary Helper, 2nd Act Obstacle, and Villain/Opponent/Threat

Those four elements need to be in every story, but also presented in your logline. It is, however, more important to address what all four of these elements create. The "Hook," or what I call, the recurring moment. We've all heard the term "hook" before, but it's rare to hear anyone actually be able to break down that term in a way that's at all understandable. **By calling it a recurring moment, it's much easier to SEE and understand at its most basic level.**

Here is an example of a logline that not only shows all four of the story elements, but as a whole, proves the story's "hook":

"A workaholic lawyer and absent father is unable to tell a lie for 24 hours during the biggest case of his career because his son made a birthday wish for his dad to never tell a lie."

This is obviously the logline for Jim Carrey's, LIAR, LIAR. It's not perfect, but it's useful in that it centers around the primary moment that the audiences will see throughout the middle of the movie. And that is?

That a lawyer will be physically unable to lie for a full day. That moment is entertaining enough to see and experience over and over again. It's enough to at least carry the comedy of the story. It is not, though, enough to deliver a fully developed movie because...why? Because that moment needs the rest of the story elements to anchor it. It needs the son that the lawyer has ignored. It needs the "biggest case of his career" as a goal. It needs the "workaholic" so that we see how difficult it will be for him to tell the truth as a lawyer.

It often helps to start the logline with the flaw of the hero. In this case, it's "workaholic and absent father." It's important because it shows what he will NOT be by the end of the story. In other words, by saying he is a workaholic and an absent father, we, the reader, know that

overcoming those flaws will be part of his overall arc, and therefore he will be at least partially opposite (in some ways, completely opposite) of who he was at the beginning.

If we wanted to get terribly formulaic, just to help you build your own logline, here is a template - a nearly "plug and play" template - of how to build it.

"When a flawed hero experiences some kind of an event that either introduces him to a secondary helper, or that secondary helper pushes him toward a new adventure in order to overcome an obstacle usually in the form of a villain within a very specific type of situation, a twist occurs that sends the hero in a new direction and completely changes everything."

Uh, yeah, that's as boring as a logline description could be, BUT it has the elements of a plug-and-play, and it's just a fun little reminder of a logline's structure and make up.

Here are two possible examples of what can create a hook and recurring moment:

A normal character forced into an extraordinary situation. [Hacksaw Ridge; disaster movies]

or

An extraordinary character dealing with normal situations. [The Good Doctor; Forrest Gump]

What do those statements naturally create? A unique situation as a whole. You could say, "a unique character in a unique situation," but usually a unique character helps CREATE the unique situation because we haven't seen that type of character in that type of situation before... and usually an extraordinary character dealing with something normal, boring, or every-day, is more interesting than seeing a super-soldier fighting in a super war. Though that can be fun sometimes, I digress...

Focus on the moment that occurs over and over again in the middle of your script - the 2nd Act. In my fantasy novel, *The Wish Keeper*, the recurring moment is, "A rebellious, disabled teenage fairy fighting not only an evil force hell bent on finding a True Love Wish before she does, while managing the heartbreak of reconciling with her parents."

Did you notice what that statement resembles? A logline!

A Note for TV Writers:

There will be a recurring moment in your pilot episode (it's the weekly "situation" for the characters, or the type of case that the two detectives will try and solve), but there will be an overarching situation in the first season too. If you take Fox's *Sleepy Hollow* as an example, every episode we see Ichabod Crane chasing down, fighting against, and defeating some form of a monster... alongside Abby who is his exact opposite, but they rely on each other

completely.

We see that type of moment in each episode, but we also see an extended form of that relationship throughout the season, AND it's the type of moment that helps sell the entire series. It's a monster of the week, meets the legend of Sleepy Hollow, meets a properly English white guy from the 1700's forming a bond with a skeptical black woman from the 21st century.

If you still need help, please order a [Logline Review Here](#). **ISACConnect Members receive \$10 off.**

For the complete lessons from The Craft Course [sign up for the course today](#) and **SAVE 50% with coupon code: craftcoursesave50**

Topic(s): [General Craft](#), [Logline](#)

Genre(s): [Action](#), [Comedy](#), [Drama](#), [Family](#), [Historical](#), [Romance](#), [Thriller](#)