

Charlotte, [April 6, 2024](#) by Charlotte Winters

<https://modernscreenplay.com/loglines-from-the-wgas-101-greatest-screenplays/>

Loglines from the WGA's 101 Greatest Screenplays—These are the marketing loglines, not the ones the writers used when pitching to producers.

As [loglines](#) can be notoriously difficult to write, I love studying them (yes, I'm a bit of a geek like that). Seeing how professionals encapsulate 110 pages into one or two sentences inspires me because what they leave in is just as important as what they leave out.

So, I thought it would be a good experiment to cull all of the loglines from the [WGA's 101 Greatest Screenplays](#) here (using Amazon, IMDB, and other credible movie sites as my sources).

Important caveat: We don't know for sure if they are the actual loglines submitted by the writers or if they are copy generated by the films' marketing and advertising teams. Still, the below sentences distill these movies into short summaries, intending to convert the internet reader into bona fide viewer.

Here's what I found:

1. **Casablanca:** A cynical expatriate American cafe owner struggles to decide whether or not to help his former lover and her fugitive husband escape the Nazis in French Morocco.
2. **The Godfather:** The aging patriarch of an organized crime dynasty transfers control of his clandestine empire to his reluctant son.
3. **Chinatown:** A private detective hired to expose an adulterer in 1930s Los Angeles finds himself caught up in a web of deceit, corruption, and murder
4. **Citizen Kane:** Following the death of publishing tycoon Charles Foster Kane, reporters scramble to uncover the meaning of his final utterance: 'Rosebud.'
5. **All About Eve:** Broadway star Margo takes the seemingly naive aspiring actress Eve under her wing but before long, it becomes clear that Eve is a manipulative conniver who cold-bloodedly uses Margo and everyone around her to rise to the top of the theatrical heap.
6. **Annie Hall:** Alvy Singer, a divorced Jewish comedian, reflects on his relationship with ex-lover Annie Hall, an aspiring nightclub singer, which ended abruptly just like his previous marriages.
7. **Sunset Boulevard:** A screenwriter develops a dangerous relationship with a faded film star determined to make a triumphant return.
8. **Network:** A television network cynically exploits a deranged former anchor's ravings and revelations about the news media for its own profit, but finds that his message may be difficult to control.
9. **Some Like It Hot:** After two male musicians witness a mob hit, they flee the state in an all-female band disguised as women, but further complications set in.
10. **The Godfather II:** The early life and career of Vito Corleone in 1920s New York City is portrayed, while his son, Michael, expands and tightens his grip on the family crime syndicate.

11. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid: In 1890s Wyoming, Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid lead a band of outlaws. When a train robbery goes wrong, they find themselves on the run with a posse hard on their heels. After considering their options, they escape to South America.

12. Dr. Strangelove: An unhinged American general orders a bombing attack on the Soviet Union, triggering a path to nuclear holocaust that a war room full of politicians and generals frantically tries to stop.

13. The Graduate: A disillusioned college graduate finds himself torn between his older lover and her daughter.

14. Lawrence of Arabia: The story of T.E. Lawrence, the English officer who successfully united and led the diverse, often warring, Arab tribes during World War I in order to fight the Turks.

15. The Apartment: A Manhattan insurance clerk tries to rise in his company by letting its executives use his apartment for trysts, but complications and a romance of his own ensue.

16. Pulp Fiction: The lives of two mob hit men, a boxer, a gangster's wife, and a pair of diner bandits intertwine in four tales of violence and redemption.

17. Tootsie: An out-of-work actor finds success, love, and frustration when he gets the role of his life...playing a woman.

18. On the Waterfront: An ex-prize fighter turned New Jersey longshoreman struggles to stand up to his corrupt union bosses, including his older brother, as he starts to connect with the grieving sister of one of the syndicate's victims.

19. To Kill a Mockingbird: Atticus Finch, a widowed lawyer in Depression-era Alabama, defends a Black man against an undeserved rape charge, and tries to educate his young children against prejudice.

20. It's a Wonderful Life: An angel is sent from Heaven to help a desperately frustrated businessman by showing him what life would have been like if he had never existed.

21. North by Northwest: A New York City advertising executive goes on the run after being mistaken for a government agent by a group of foreign spies, and falls for a woman whose loyalties he begins to doubt.

22. Shawshank Redemption: Two imprisoned men bond over a number of years, finding solace and eventual redemption through acts of common decency.

23. Gone with the Wind: A sheltered and manipulative Southern belle and a roguish profiteer face off in a turbulent romance as the society around them crumbles with the end of slavery and is rebuilt during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods.

24. Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind: When their relationship turns sour, a couple undergoes a medical procedure to have each other erased from their memories.

25. The Wizard of Oz: Young Dorothy Gale and her dog Toto are swept away by a tornado from their Kansas farm to the magical Land of Oz, and embark on a quest with three new friends to see the Wizard, who can return her to her home and fulfill the others' wishes.

26. Double Indemnity: A Los Angeles insurance representative lets an alluring housewife seduce him into a scheme of insurance fraud and murder that arouses the suspicion of his colleague, an insurance investigator.

27. [Groundhog Day](#): A weatherman finds himself inexplicably living the same day over and over again.

28. Shakespeare in Love: The world's greatest ever playwright, William Shakespeare, is young, out of ideas and short of cash, but meets his ideal woman and is inspired to write one of his most famous plays.

29. Sullivan's Travels: Hollywood director John L. Sullivan sets out to experience life as a homeless person in order to gain relevant life experience for his next movie.

30. Unforgiven: Retired Old West gunslinger William Munny reluctantly takes on one last job, with the help of his old partner Ned Logan and a young man, The "Schofield Kid."

31. His Girl Friday: A newspaper editor uses every trick in the book to keep his ace reporter ex-wife from remarrying.

32. Fargo: Minnesota car salesman Jerry Lundegaard's inept crime falls apart due to his and his henchmen's bungling and the persistent police work of the quite pregnant Marge Gunderson.

33. The Third Man: Pulp novelist Holly Martins travels to shadowy, postwar Vienna, only to find himself investigating the mysterious death of an old friend, Harry Lime.

34. The Sweet Smell of Success: An all-powerful New York gossip columnist forces a press agent to do his dirty work in exchange for press coverage in his column.

35. The Usual Suspects: Five small-time criminals begin an ill-fated association

36. Midnight Cowboy: When hayseed hustler Joe Buck comes to Manhattan to earn cash as a gigolo and work toward his dream of becoming a kept man, he meets seedy gimp Ratso Rizzo, and an improbable friendship blossoms.

37. The Philadelphia Story: When a rich woman's ex-husband and a tabloid-type reporter turn up just before her planned remarriage, she begins to learn the truth about herself.

38. [American Beauty](#): A sexually frustrated suburban father has a mid-life crisis after becoming infatuated with his daughter's best friend.

39. The Sting: Two con men (Robert Redford and Paul Newman) team up to avenge the murder of a mutual friend by pulling off the ultimate big con and swindling a mobster (Robert Shaw) in director George Roy Hill's Academy Award winning Best Picture.

40. [When Harry Met Sally](#): Harry and Sally meet on a trip to New York after graduating. As their lives and careers grow separately, their paths cross over and over again, causing them to consider a romance with each other.

41. Goodfellas: Director Martin Scorsese exposes the fascinating, mysterious and violent underworld of New York's Mafia families through the life of insider Henry Hill as he rises from smalltime thug to mobster in this searing, epic crime drama.

42. Raiders of the Lost Ark: An intrepid archaeologist and adventurer must contend with a group of Nazis in his search for an ancient religious relic that affords the power of world domination. His quest takes him across the globe, with danger at every turn.

43. Taxi Driver: A mentally unstable veteran works as a nighttime taxi driver in New York City, where the perceived decadence and sleaze fuels his urge for violent action.

44. The Best Years of Our Lives: Three World War II veterans, two of them traumatized or disabled, return home to the American midwest to discover that they and their families have been irreparably changed.

45. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: In the Fall of 1963, a Korean War veteran and criminal pleads insanity and is admitted to a mental institution, where he rallies up the scared patients against the tyrannical nurse.

46. The Treasure of the Sierra Madre: Two down-on-their-luck Americans searching for work in 1920s Mexico convince an old prospector to help them mine for gold in the Sierra Madre Mountains.

47. The Maltese Falcon: San Francisco private detective Sam Spade takes on a case that involves him with three eccentric criminals, a gorgeous liar and their quest for a priceless statuette, with the stakes rising after his partner is murdered.

48. The Bridge on the River Kwai: British POWs are forced to build a railway bridge across the river Kwai for their Japanese captors in occupied Burma, not knowing that the allied forces are planning a daring commando raid through the jungle to destroy it

49. Schindler's List: In German-occupied Poland during World War II, industrialist Oskar Schindler gradually becomes concerned for his Jewish workforce after witnessing their persecution by the Nazis.

50. The Sixth Sense: When Dr. Malcolm Crowe , a distinguished child psychologist, meets Cole Sear, a frightened, confused, eight-year-old, Dr. Crowe is completely unprepared to face the truth of what haunts Cole.

51. Broadcast News: The frantic world of network television news is viewed from the perspective of three ambitious colleagues in this Oscar(R)-nominated film.

52. The Lady Eve: A trio of classy card sharps targets the socially awkward heir to brewery millions for his money, until one of them falls in love with him.

53. All the President's Men: Reporters Woodward and Bernstein uncover the details of the Watergate scandal that leads to President Nixon's resignation.

54. Manhattan: The life of a divorced television writer dating a teenage girl is further complicated when he falls in love with his best friend's mistress.

55. Apocalypse Now: An Army captain's secret mission becomes a journey into madness in Francis Ford Coppola's spectacular drama of the Vietnam War.

56. [Back to the Future](#): A 17-year-old high school student is accidentally sent thirty years into the past in a time-traveling DeLorean invented by his close friend, a maverick scientist.

57. Crimes and Misdemeanors: An ophthalmologist's mistress threatens to reveal their affair to his wife while a married documentary filmmaker is infatuated with another woman.

58. Ordinary People: The accidental death of the older son of an affluent family deeply strains the relationships among the bitter mother, the good-natured father and the guilt-ridden younger son.

59. It Happened One Night: A renegade reporter trailing a young runaway heiress for a big story joins her on a bus heading from Florida to New York, and they end up stuck with each other when the bus leaves them behind at one of the stops.

60. L.A. Confidential: As corruption grows in 1950s Los Angeles, three policemen – one strait-laced, one brutal, and one sleazy – investigate a series of murders with their own brand of justice.

61. The Silence of the Lambs: A young F.B.I. cadet must receive the help of an incarcerated and manipulative cannibal killer to help catch another serial killer, a madman who skins his victims.

62. Moonstruck: A widowed Brooklyn book-keeper is torn between her fiancé and his brother.

63. Jaws: When a killer shark unleashes chaos on a beach community, it's up to a local sheriff, a marine biologist, and an old seafarer to hunt the beast down.

64. Terms of Endearment: Widowed Aurora Greenway keeps several suitors at arm's length in River Oaks, Houston, focusing instead on her close, but controlling, relationship with daughter Emma. Anxious to escape her mother, Emma marries callow young college professor Flap Horton over her mother's objections.

65. Singin' in the Rain: A silent film star falls for a chorus girl just as he and his delusionally jealous screen partner are trying to make the difficult transition to talking pictures in 1920s Hollywood.

66. Jerry Maguire: When a sports agent has a moral epiphany and is fired for expressing it, he decides to put his new philosophy to the test as an independent agent with the only athlete who stays with him and his former colleague.

67. E.T.: A troubled child summons the courage to help a friendly alien escape Earth and return to his home world.

68. Star Wars: A spirited farm boy joins a rebellion to save a princess from a sinister imperial enforcer — and the galaxy — from a planet-destroying weapon.

69. Dog Day Afternoon: True story about a bank robbery gone haywire one hot August day when two optimistic losers, the frantic master-mind Sonny, and his slow-witted buddy Sal, attempt to rob a Brooklyn bank.

70. The African Queen: As the First World War breaks out, a proud and pious missionary finds herself navigating a multitude of perils: the harsh African wilderness, dastardly German soldiers, and the sharp-tongued, gin-soaked steamboat captain who is her only ticket to safety.

71. The Lion in Winter: The hateful family King Henry II is brought together to secure an heir. The destructive relationships in the family erupt as they scheme to determine who will be the future king.

72. [Thelma & Louise](#): Two best friends set out on an adventure, but it soon turns around to a terrifying escape from being hunted by the police, as these two women escape for the crimes they committed.

73. [Amadeus](#): Based on a Viennese urban legend and hit Broadway play, recounts the downfall of 18th-century musical genius Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

74. [Being John Malkovich](#): A frustrated puppeteer discovers a secret portal into the mind of a famous actor, an experience he mistakenly shares with his animal-loving wife and a frosty, attractive coworker.

75. [High Noon](#): A town Marshal, despite the disagreements of his newlywed bride and the townspeople around him, must face a gang of deadly killers alone at “high noon” when the gang leader, an outlaw he “sent up” years ago, arrives on the noon train.

76. [Raging Bull](#): Middleweight boxer Jake LaMotta is rising up the ranks, obliterating his opponents, but out of the ring, he can’t control his temper, and his violence and inability to express his feelings send him into a downward spiral of despair.

77. [Adaptation](#): A lovelorn screenwriter becomes desperate as he tries and fails to adapt ‘The Orchid Thief’ by Susan Orlean for the screen.

78. [Rocky](#): A small-time Philadelphia boxer gets a supremely rare chance to fight the world heavyweight champion in a bout in which he strives to go the distance for his self-respect.

79. [The Producers](#): Max Bialystock is a washed up Broadway producer who has fallen on hard times. Enter his nervous accountant, Leo Bloom, who makes him realize they could make more money with a flop than a hit...

80. [Witness](#): When an Amish woman and her son get involved in the murder of an undercover narcotics agent, their savior is revealed as hardened Philly detective John Book. Book goes into hiding in Amish country to protect the family until the trial’s completion.

81. [Being There](#): After the death of his employer forces him out of the only home he’s ever known, a simpleminded, sheltered gardener becomes an unlikely trusted advisor to a powerful tycoon and an insider in Washington politics.

82. [Cool Hand Luke](#): A laid-back Southern man is sentenced to two years in a rural prison, but refuses to conform.

83. [Rear Window](#): A wheelchair-bound photographer spies on his neighbors from his Greenwich Village courtyard apartment window and, despite the skepticism of his fashion-model girlfriend, becomes convinced one of them has committed murder.

84. [The Princess Bride](#): A bedridden boy’s grandfather reads him the story of a farm boy-turned-pirate who encounters numerous obstacles, enemies, and allies in his quest to be reunited with his true love.

85. [La Grande Illusion](#): During WWI, two French soldiers are captured and imprisoned in a German P.O.W. camp. Several escape attempts follow until they are eventually sent to a seemingly inescapable fortress.

86. [Harold & Maude](#): Young, rich, and obsessed with death, Harold finds himself changed forever when he meets lively septuagenarian Maude at a funeral.

87. 8 ½: Marcello Mastroianni plays Guido Anselmi, a director whose new project is collapsing around him, along with his life. One of the greatest films about film ever made, Federico Fellini's 8½ turns one man's artistic crisis into a grand epic of the cinema. An early working title was *The Beautiful Confusion*, and Fellini's masterpiece is exactly that: a shimmering dream, a circus, and a magic act.

88. Field of Dreams: Iowa farmer Ray Kinsella is inspired by a voice he can't ignore to pursue a dream he can hardly believe. Supported by his wife, Ray begins the quest by turning his ordinary cornfield into a place where dreams can come true.

89. Forrest Gump: The history of the United States from the 1950s to the '70s unfolds from the perspective of an Alabama man with an IQ of 75, who yearns to be reunited with his childhood sweetheart.

90. Sideways: Two men reaching middle age with not much to show but disappointment embark on a week-long road trip through California's wine country, just as one is about to take a trip down the aisle.

91. The Verdict: An outcast, alcoholic Boston lawyer sees the chance to salvage his career and self-respect by taking a medical malpractice case to trial rather than settling.

92. Psycho: A Phoenix secretary embezzles \$40,000 from her employer's client, goes on the run and checks into a remote motel run by a young man under the domination of his mother.

93. Do the Right Thing: On the hottest day of the year on a street in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, everyone's hate and bigotry smolders and builds until it explodes into violence.

94. Patton: The World War II phase of the career of controversial American general George S. Patton.

95. Hannah and Her Sisters: Between two Thanksgivings two years apart, Hannah's husband falls in love with her sister Lee, while her hypochondriac ex-husband rekindles his relationship with her sister Holly.

96. The Hustler: An up-and-coming pool player plays a long-time champion in a single high-stakes match.

97. The Searchers: An American Civil War veteran embarks on a years-long journey to rescue his niece from the Comanches after the rest of his brother's family is massacred in a raid on their Texas farm

98. The Grapes of Wrath: An Oklahoma family, driven off their farm by the poverty and hopelessness of the Dust Bowl, joins the westward migration to California, suffering the misfortunes of the homeless in the Great Depression.

99. Sideways: Two men reaching middle age with not much to show but disappointment embark on a week-long road trip through California's wine country, just as one is about to take a trip down the aisle.

100. Memento: A man with short-term memory loss attempts to track down his wife's murderer.

101. Notorious: The daughter of a convicted German spy is asked by American agents to gather information on a ring of German scientists in South America. How far will she have to go to ingratiate herself with them?