Screenplay Coverage
How To Win the Hearts and Minds of Readers

Northwest Screenwriters Guild
with George Thomas Jr.
INT. HIP COFFEEHOUSE – NIGHT

What we’ll cover:

• Components of coverage
• Industry expectations
• Screenwriting examples
• Make it easy for readers to recommend your work
Script coverage

“…an analysis and grading of screenplays….”

-- Wikipedia

Coverage
…helps producers make business decisions

Screenplay analysis
…helps writers prepare scripts for producers
Screenplay analysis ≠ coverage
Why coverage?
What comprises coverage

- Genre and budget
- Logline
- Synopsis
- Character summaries
- Analysis
- Ranking grid
What comprises coverage

<table>
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<tr>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>VERY GOOD</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>SO-SO</th>
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<td>Main Characters</td>
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(SCRIPT) RECOMMEND: CONSIDER: XX PASS:
(WRITER) RECOMMEND: CONSIDER: XX PASS:
(CONCEPT) RECOMMEND: XX CONSIDER: PASS:
George’s custom analysis

Coverage typically not as deep as “screenplay analysis.”

CONCEPT
PREMISE/THEME
PLOT
STORY STRUCTURE
SCENE STRUCTURE
CAUSE AND EFFECT
SETUPS AND PAYOFFS
ECONOMY OF WRITING
FIRST 10 PAGES
MAIN CHARACTER

KEY SUPPORTING CHARACTERS
CHARACTER INTRODUCTIONS
MINOR CHARACTERS
DIALOGUE
ACTION REVEALS CHARACTER
ACTION DESCRIPTIONS
INDUSTRY-STANDARD FORMAT
VISUAL ELEMENTS
TITLE
COMMERCIAL
What comprises coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Elements</th>
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<td>(SCRIPT) RECOMMEND:</td>
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<td>(WRITER) RECOMMEND:</td>
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<td>(CONCEPT) RECOMMEND:</td>
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<td>XX</td>
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<tr>
<td>(CONCEPT) RECOMMEND:</td>
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</table>
What comprises coverage

Percentage of time spent on key coverage tasks:

- Synopsis, 50%
- Analysis, 25%
- Character summaries, 15%
- Ranking grid, 10%
What comprises coverage

Coverage reports are primarily objective

- Synopsis, 50%
- Analysis, 25%
- Ranking grid, 10%
- Character summaries, 15%
What comprises coverage

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<td>Writers:</td>
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<td>Analyst:</td>
<td>George Thomas Jr.</td>
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Coverage = Trust
Who does coverage?
Getting to "RECOMMEND"

It’s about a character who....

Actors want to act!
Getting to "RECOMMEND"

• If I’m not mistaken….
Getting to "RECOMMEND"

• All characters must affect the story!
Getting to "RECOMMEND"

- Create a character grid:
  - How does each character feel about the other?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rick</th>
<th>Ilsa</th>
<th>Victor Laszlo</th>
<th>Capt. Renault</th>
<th>Major Strasser</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Hates himself</td>
<td>Best love ever!</td>
<td>Respect; jealous</td>
<td>Cuts him slack</td>
<td>Despises Nazis</td>
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<td>Capt. Renault</td>
<td>Admiration</td>
<td>Wants her</td>
<td>Disruptive</td>
<td>At peace with contradictions</td>
<td>Disdain</td>
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</table>
Getting to "RECOMMEND"

• Dialogue speaks volumes

Subtext
ROGER
Late again, I see.

TOM
I’m like the wind Roger, I come and go as I please.

ROGER
You notice I’m never late, and I got two kids.

TOM
I always wondered why you had that picture on your desk.

Indeed he does, Roger and his wife with two young kids --
SAMMY
He can stay in the little room.
(Pause)
But you know what? He’s not coming to live with us, he’s just coming for a visit. He probably won’t stay very long...
And it’s OK if you don’t remember him, because you were only six the last time he was here... But it’ll be nice if you get a chance to get to know each other a little bit. Don’t you think?
EXT. CITY RESIDENCE – DAY

An Alarm BLARES.

Hooded individuals in sweat pants nimbly exit the window of an upscale two story residence, and move swiftly along the rooftops, vaulting from one roof to the next.
EXT. THE BURGUE (AERIAL VIEW) – MORNING

An urban hodgepodge of crumbling rooftops, grimy belfries, and smoke-stained spires. Chimneys and smokestacks pump towers of soot into a stone gray sky.
TONY GOTLER (30), a handsome if bald perfectionist and his girlfriend BETH WILCOX (30), a petite, no nonsense Midwesterner, look at each other awkwardly as their WAITER lays down a small cake with a number FOUR candle in the middle.
INT. FORD’S APARTMENT, FORD’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

This is HARRISON SILVER, everybody calls him “Ford.” He hates that. He’s a good-looking insomniac, 30.
INT. DINING ROOM, DUPONT CLUB - MORNING

It’s breakfast, there’s a soft hum of conversation. The glass windows on one side show off the D.C. skyline. BEN BRADLEE (late 40s, articulate but short-tempered) sits with his back against the view. He has a red pencil in hand and reads the draft of a story: “Senate Told Nixon Aid to Laos Illegal”.

Chryon: June 9, 1971

Bradlee rubs his eyes and looks around the room. There are MEN scattered amongst the tables reading newspapers. Bradlee squints to get a better look – every paper is “The New York Times”. He frowns and looks back at the story – bored.

KAY (O.S.)

Am I late?

KATHARINE “KAY” GRAHAM (mid 50s) speaks with trained intent – never letting something slip that she hasn’t considered many times over. She’s well put together but not ostentatious.
The RECOMMEND Checklist

- Clarity
- Visual
- Subtext
- Actor bait / character arc
- Conflict
- Scene depth
The RECOMMEND Checklist

- ✓ Cause and effect
- ✓ Setups and payoffs
- ✓ Scenes reflect genre
- ✓ Rising stakes and complications
## Spec sales

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*Source: The Scoggins Report*
Is your script ready?

• Feedback from fellow screenwriters
  – even non-screenwriters

• Read-through with actors

• Industry feedback
Get to “RECOMMEND”

• Write with the “RECOMMEND” checklist in mind

• Get relevant feedback

• Think like a producer

• Understand you are a gatekeeper, too
  -- Producers are always searching for quality material AND readers want to enjoy coverage assignments!
Thank you!

Oct. 20: Anonymous Content’s Paul Green comes to town: nwsg.org/events

@sosaysgeorge

My blog: ActionRomanceIntrigue.com