

THE LOGLINE FORMULA GUIDE

HOW TO WRITE A LOGLINE THAT GETS YOUR FILM READ

A logline is the single most important sentence you will write about your film. It is your first impression in every pitch room, grant application, and festival submission. It is not a synopsis. It is not a tagline. It is a precise, compressed promise of the story — and it must do its job in one sentence.

THE MASTER FORMULA

#1 PROTAGONIST

WHO is your story about? Not a job title — a specific person with a flaw, a wound, or a want. The more specific, the more universal. Don't write 'a detective.' Write 'a disgraced detective haunted by the case he couldn't solve.'

#2 INCITING INCIDENT

WHAT happens to set the story in motion? This is the event that forces your protagonist out of their ordinary world and into the story. It must be specific and active.

#3 CENTRAL CONFLICT

WHAT stands in their way? This is the obstacle — the antagonist, the system, the internal demon, the impossible choice. Without conflict, you have a premise, not a story.

#4 STAKES

WHAT happens if they fail? The stakes are what make the audience care. They can be physical (life/death), emotional (love/loss), or moral (identity/integrity). The higher and more personal, the better.

THE FILL-IN-THE-BLANK TEMPLATE

This template is a starting point — not a cage. Once you understand why each element is there, you can break the formula intentionally.

LOGLINE EXAMPLES — BEFORE & AFTER

See the difference specificity and stakes make:

DOCUMENTARY

WEAK:

A film about a woman who survived cancer and started a nonprofit.

STRONG:

After surviving a terminal diagnosis that her doctors called impossible, a former corporate attorney abandons her career to build a medical advocacy organization in the same hospital that once sent her home to die — only to discover the system is designed to stop her.

NARRATIVE SHORT

WEAK:

A teenager deals with her parents' divorce by running away.

STRONG:

When her parents announce their divorce on the morning of her championship track meet, a sixteen-year-old girl goes on the run across her small Georgia town — carrying a letter she wrote to her future self that she's no longer sure she believes.

FEATURE DRAMA

WEAK:

A musician tries to make it in the music industry.

STRONG:

Weeks before his record label drops him for good, a once-celebrated jazz pianist agrees to produce an album for the teenage daughter of the man who stole his career — and finds himself choosing between revenge and the music he almost lost.

COMMON LOGLINE MISTAKES

X Too vague

'A woman goes on a journey of self-discovery' tells us nothing about story, stakes, or character.

X Too long

If your logline is more than 2 sentences, it's a synopsis. Cut it until it hurts.

X No stakes

If we don't know what the protagonist will lose, we don't know why we should care.

X Passive protagonist

'A man is affected by...' — your protagonist must WANT something and PURSUE it.

X Genre confusion

Your logline's tone should match your film's tone. A horror logline should feel unsettling.

X Spoiling the ending

Hint at the stakes — don't reveal the resolution. Leave them wanting to know what happens.

WRITE YOUR LOGLINE HERE

MY PROTAGONIST IS:

THE INCITING INCIDENT IS:

THE CENTRAL CONFLICT IS:

THE STAKES ARE:

MY LOGLINE (DRAFT 1):

MY LOGLINE (DRAFT 2):