REWRITE CHECKLIST
Excerpt of tips from The Dreaded Rewrite

AFTER FIRST DRAFT:
• Never let anyone read your first draft.
• When it’s done, write a synopsis. You’ll see holes in your story.
• Rewrite beat sheet/outline: It should have changed in first draft.
• Clean up the crime scene: Start with structure and work your way down to wordsmithing

ASK QUESTIONS:
Remove yourself as the writer and look at the work as a reader:
• Is the theme clear?
• Are you torturing protagonist enough?
• Is the world he lives interesting?
• Did you start story at the right place in the protagonist’s life?
• Have you chosen the right protagonist?
• Does protagonist evolve fully?
• Is antagonist the mirror of the protagonist?
• Is antagonist more interesting than protagonist?

SCENES:
• Take scenes one at a time, asking:
  – Does it advance the story?
  – Does it add exposition?
  – Does it create conflict?
• If you can’t answer “yes” to 2 out of 3, cut the darling and move important exposition to a different scene.
• If scene is really important to the story, brainstorm other conflicts you can add to it... ask “what if?”
• Re-Index card the script: One color for plot A, another for plot B, etc.
• Spread them on a table and move them around for pacing and suspense. What happens when you cut straight from this moment to that moment? Play with the shuffling the scenes.
• Index cards: One color for protagonist, another for antagonist
• Put your “dead scenes” in a folder... you might need them back in a later rewrite.
• Analyze the beginning and ending of your scenes: Start late, leave early.
• Challenge each scene to serve its purpose in fewer words.
• Make the final line of each scene powerful... one that makes the reader have to turn the page.
• Goal is a “fast read.”

CHARACTERS:
• Isolate each character, one at a time.
  – Check for evolution
  – Read dialogue out loud. Be sure the tone and voice are consistent and unique to each character.
  – Ask what the character is feeling in each scene. Are her actions and dialogue consistent with those emotions?
• Count pages between scenes the protagonist is in. Don’t let him/her be off screen too long.

DESCRIPTORS:
• Description: Less is more.
  – Write visually: only what the audience can see onscreen.
  – Use action verbs
  – CAPS for the first time we meet a character and the first time we see a prop.
  – No more than four lines of description.

DIALOGUE:
• Less is more.
  – Does it sound authentic or on-the-nose?
  – Trust the actor
  – Don’t recap something we already know
  – Does each character have a unique voice (Read aloud, one at a time)
  – Be quotable: Just two great lines turns script to gold.
  – Can you convey some of that dialogue in action instead? That goes a LONG way in making a film more visual.
  – Use Twitter tip of making your dialogue only 140 characters long.

FINAL PASS: • Wordsmithing. Check for typos and grammar.
MORE REWRITE HELP IS HERE!

Need more help on your rewrite? The Writers Store Screenplay Development Notes can give professional feedback on your script to help make it shine.

The Writers Store also offers an The Dreaded Rewrite On Demand Webinar by Script Magazine’s editor, Jeanne Veillette Bowerman.

The Dreaded Rewrite

At a Glance
• Discover the necessities and tricks of a page-one rewrite.
• Learn how to get and analyze honest feedback to improve your work.
• Get unique tips to help you fine tune your story to make a positive first impression on an executive.

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