

What is a logline?

A **logline** is a brief summary of a television programme, film or motion picture often providing both a synopsis of the plot of the program and an emotional “**hook**” to stimulate interest. It generally consists of a single-sentence description of your film’s basic story idea in very few words. You might also hear it referred to as the concept or the **premise**. It is the concisely written version of what you say when people ask you the question, “So what’s your film about?”

- **Why the logline is a good test of story – simplicity.**

Film is a **demanding** medium. You have just an hour and a half – 2 hours if you’re lucky – to tell your story. That’s nothing. The **average** 300-page novel might take 6 hours to film – which is one reason why most book adaptations fail to become films. So, good movies tend to have simple story ideas. The plots might be complex, but the concepts are almost always simple. That’s why the logline is such a great test of film stories: one sentence with very few words. If your story is too complex to be told in, say, 27 words, then it’s almost certainly too complicated for a 90 min. movie.

- **Why the logline is a good test of story – marketability.**

Writing films is **tough** but marketing them is even more difficult. How do you attract people’s attention in a **one-sheet poster**? How do you hook them with a **tagline**? How do you open a window in their diary with a 15 second trailer? Again, it needs to be a simple, easy to communicate idea. But it also needs to be immediately **compelling**. If you can’t **hook** filmmakers in very few words you’ll have no chance with the cinema-going public.

■ What should you include in the logline?

Learning to write loglines is an art in itself. Here are some **tips** for what you should include in those precious 27 words:

- **Who is the hero?** – You should identify the protagonist (though not necessarily by name), the person whose story this is, the character with whom we are meant to identify; e.g. an ageing baseball player, an alcoholic lawyer, a struggling single mother.
- **What is the quest?** – What does the hero want? What is the external goal that is going to drive the events of at least the second act and possibly even the third act as well; e.g. he has to kill a great white shark, rescue the princess from a dragon or she has to find the **groom**.
- **What is the hero’s flaw?** – Stories are plots that force the hero to grow. What is your hero’s failing? Does he lack courage or compassion? What sort of opportunity is there here for emotional growth? E.g.: selfish, **coward**, **greedy**, materialistic, immoral, **womanizer**, **ruthless**, **workaholic**, obsessive.
- **Where is the conflict?** – **Drama** is all about conflict, so we need to understand why this quest is going to be difficult for the hero.
- **What’s at stake?** – For audiences to care, the hero has to have a very strong motivation. If they don’t achieve this goal, the consequences are massive – in their eyes any way. You will generally try to convey in your logline what’s at stake.
- **Who is the antagonist?** – You won’t always include the antagonist – unless it’s a romantic comedy – but it can be a good way to establish the conflict and the impossibility of the hero’s quest.
- **What is the tone?** – If it’s a comedy, it’s a good idea to try to **convey** that through either the title or the logline.
- **What’s the USP** – In advertising, they used to talk about Unique Selling Point (USP), the thing that set the product apart from its competitors. What is it about your film that is most likely to appeal to the audience?

average: *nella media, usuale*
to convey: *esprimere, comunicare*
compelling: *avvincente*
coward: *codardo, vile*
demanding: *esigente*
drama: *tensione emotiva*
flaw: *difetto, debolezza*
greedy: *avidò*

groom: *sposo*
hook: *amo, gancio*
logline: *(cin.) presentazione sintetica*
marketability: *commerciabilità*
one-sheet poster: *manifesto di una facciata*
premise: *premessa*
quest: *ricerca*

ruthless: *spietato*
stake: *posta, rischio*
tip: *consiglio*
tagline: *motto pubblicitario, slogan*
tough: *difficile, molto impegnativo*
womanizer: *donnaiolo*
workaholic: *maniaco del lavoro, stakanovista*

1  **Decide whether the following statements are true or false and correct the false ones.**


- a. Logline is a synonym of tagline.
- b. The passage contains tips for screenwriters.
- c. A trailer lasts a quarter of an hour.
- d. The average 300-page novel might take 6 hours to film.
- e. The hero has to have a very strong motivation.
- f. Stories are plots in which the hero does not develop.

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2  **Connect the film titles to the loglines.**

- 1. *Invictus* a. US soldiers try to save their comrade who's stationed behind enemy lines.
- 2. *Save Private Ryan* b. A writer struggles to adapt a book into a screenplay as he copes with the inadequacies of his life.
- 3. *Adaptation* c. After the fall of apartheid, new South African President Nelson Mandela campaigns to host the 1995 Rugby World Cup as an opportunity to unite his countrymen.

3  **PAIR WORK** Discuss the following questions.

- 1. What is the purpose of a logline?
- 2. Why do you think it is so important?
- 3. Why is writing successful loglines an art in itself?

