

How To Write A Treatment

What Is a Treatment?

A film treatment is used by scriptwriters to outline their plot and character ideas for a movie. It is used to encourage film companies to take on the film.

The point of the treatment is to communicate your story as quickly as possible, so brevity without sacrificing juice is the key here.

A treatment is a two to five page document that tells the whole story focusing on the highlights.

How To Write a Treatment

This two to five page document should read like a short story and be **written in the present tense**.

It should present the entire story including the ending, and use some key scenes and some dialogue from the screenplay it is based on.

What Should Be in the Treatment?

- A Working title
- The writer's name and contact information
- Introduction to key characters
- Who, what, when, why and where.
- Act 1 in one to three paragraphs. Set the scene, dramatise the main conflicts.
- Act 2 in two to six paragraphs. Should dramatise how the conflicts introduced in Act 1 lead to a crisis.
- Act 3 in one to three paragraphs. Dramatise the final conflict and resolution.

The Three Act Structure

Act 1, called the Set-up, The situation and characters and conflict are introduced. This classically is 30 minutes long.

Act 2, called The Conflict, often an hour long, is where the conflict begins and expands until it reaches a crisis.

Act 3, called The Resolution, the conflict rises to one more crisis and then is resolved.

Writing the Treatment

1. Find A Title
2. Write a brief description of what happens in the 3 acts.

Here's an example from The Proposal

Act 1: Successful book editor Margaret Tate is threatened with deportation to Canada unless she gets married. She tells immigration that she is engaged to her assistant Andrew who hates her. He agrees if she promises him a promotion.

Act 2: Margaret and Andrew travel to his family's house in Alaska still pretending they are engaged. Andrew doesn't get on with his dad which causes problems. Margaret is out of place but is made welcome by the family. Andrew's dad finds out about the fake engagement and calls immigration.

Act 3: Margaret and Andrew fall in love. The immigration officer arrives. Margaret confesses the wedding is fake and leaves. Andrew goes after her and proposes for real.

3. Expand the synopsis into a Treatment - Here's an example

Margaret Tate is a successful editor for a top New York publisher. She makes her assistant Andrew work hard. Margaret is called into the office by her boss who informs her that she is to be deported back to her Canada. When Andrew enters the office, she announces that the two are to be married. Andrew is too stunned to deny otherwise. They go together to the immigration office to inform them of the engagement. Andrew tells Margaret that he will only lie to immigration if she gives him a promotion. He tells immigration that they are in love and are travelling to Alaska for his grandmother's 90th birthday party.

On reaching Alaska Margaret is clearly uncomfortable in this environment but finds out that Andrew's family are very rich. At the house they meet the family who are overjoyed at Andrew's engagement. Andrew's father is unconvinced about the marriage as Andrew has spent 3 years complaining about Margaret. Margaret is taken out by the girls in Andrew's family and begins to relax a little. She is enjoying being with friends and family as her own parents died when she was very young. She learns more about Andrew and his ambitions to become a writer from his ex-girlfriend. Back at the house Andrew has an argument with his father, who wants him to come home and look after the family business. That night Margaret and Andrew find out more about each other and realise they share the same sense of humour.

The next morning, Andrew's parents arrive with Grandma and insist that they get married the next day in the family barn. Andrew and Margaret hesitate but quickly agree when Grandma asks if they could do so before she dies. Margaret is taken wedding dress shopping by Andrew's mother Grace and Grandma and is given a family necklace. Margaret breaks down with happiness. Andrew's father has found out about the false engagement and has called immigration. When the immigration officer arrives Andrew angrily tells him that he loves Margaret and they are getting married.

The wedding ceremony goes ahead but before she says her vows Margaret turns to the family and explains the truth. She leaves to return to New York. Andrew realises that he loves her and rushes to the airport to tell her. He arrives just as Margaret's plane is taking off. Back in New York Margaret is packing up her office to go back to Canada. Andrew arrives and proposes for real.