



SCRIPT PIPELINE

– xxx by xxx –

**names X'd out for privacy*

OVERALL: It is evident mid-way through the script that you have a firm grasp on your characters, naturally the most notable of which your protagonist, Aaron. He stands as a conflicted figure, caught between religion, social expectations, and everyday pressures of being a teenager and, eventually, an adult. Without a doubt, this is the character that we bond with most and will continue to bond with in subsequent drafts. Aaron is the link holding everything together—the themes being presented, the execution of the plot, and the mere entertainment value of the screenplay. That being said, xxx tends to stray from its primary focus: Aaron's development as an individual, his goals and motivations included, and how his arc grows from beginning to end. Not to say he doesn't face huge roadblocks in his coming-of-age, but rather the script is lacking a solid core we can grasp onto. As a result, the screenplay reads more like a chronological series of ordinary events instead of a complete and unified story. However, the problems may not be as major as one might expect. Honestly, it's merely a matter of cutting the script down and focusing on a certain portion of Aaron's life, not his entire life story. Place characterization and structure, as well as the components affecting structure (e.g. conflict and what's at stake for your central character) as a top priority. Dialogue, too, could use some modification, but make that a secondary concern. Fortunately, you've built a very strong basis for the story. Now it's just a matter of zeroing in on the heart of this script and exploiting your original vision in full. Could be a fantastic screenplay when it's all said and done.

CHARACTERS: You've imagined a sympathetic and alluring protagonist in Aaron. He has loads of potential to become an even deeper and multifaceted character. Part of the reason his development is somewhat limited relates to a problematic structure, which will be discussed shortly. The notion here is to bring Aaron completely to the forefront of the script. Thus far, his identity as a realistic figure seems to get lost in too many situations and plot tangents. Essentially, you've created a story too big for your character, consequently restricting our perceptions of him and his real emotional conflicts. What are his goals, his motivations? How will other characters or external factors hinder him from his one, ideal objective? Might be best to have him shoot for one career or life target, while maintaining those minor goals he sets for himself—becoming a great swimmer, sustaining a relationship, discovering his identity, and finding his niche in the world.

For instance, and this may be a mediocre suggestion, but let's say over the course of the story he's experiencing all these new things and meeting new people, but his single intention is to prove to his parents (and himself) that he can regain his status as a swimming talent. So basically, the friends and situations he encounters either distract him from or encourage him toward reaching that single goal, until eventually he finds his place in the Rainbow Games. Or, if that's not the angle you prefer, you can take a slightly more serious and less external goal and spotlight his sexuality. Let's say his parents have accepted him as a homosexual, but suddenly, he starts fighting his own feelings and forces himself into a heterosexual relationship, only to realize that perhaps neither kind of relationship can work, which could lead to self-doubt, suicidal thoughts, poor performance in school . . . a host of outcomes. Basically, in this scenario, he is motivated by the search for personal identity, and what you end up having is a script about one man's exploration within himself—kind of a mini urban epic, fueled by realism and emotions any reader or audience can empathize with. Bottom line is that Aaron is a pretty

dense and interesting character, but we never get to completely grasp a sense of that dimension due to a surplus of objectives never fully explored. You touch upon his relationship with a girl, his battling HIV (or what we can assume was an HIV-positive test, due to the drugs he was taking), and his swimming prowess, but none of these issues connects to one, single goal.

In relation to the remainder of the cast, see if you can include only the characters that have a significant impact on Aaron's life. Arguably, everyone here bears some degree of influence, be it positive or negative, yet there are some, especially in the beginning, that may be dispensable. More regarding that in the following section on structure. Lastly, avoid introducing new characters in the third act unless absolutely necessary. Theoretically, the final few scenes and/or sequences should highlight and sufficiently wrap up the resolutions of characters we've grown accustomed to throughout the screenplay.

PLOT / STRUCTURE: This is probably the most crucial component of the script, and the one element that needs the most thought and adjustment. As was stated, *xxx* is actually an enjoyable script, but it gets bogged down due to a sort of meandering plot where it's difficult to determine the overall purpose. Even if it's based on a true story, there are areas that require modification. While it is spectacular you rely on many visuals in the beginning, there might be *too* much of a reliance on imagery without enough explanation of what's going on, where we're going, and who will be going on this journey with us, at least in the first handful of scenes. For instance, the shooting scene with the boys, which is quite powerful in itself, leads us to believe that the event will play an integral part in the narrative and in some fashion propel the main plot forward, but it's never really broached again to any noteworthy extent. Sure, it's a turning point in Aaron's childhood, however if it doesn't fit into the fundamental plot, you could probably take it out and simply refer or allude to it in a later conversation. There's the basic Screenwriting 101 rule of "show don't tell," and it's true. Every writer should bear that in mind, there's merely limits on when it's best to employ that tactic. In the case of this script, the introduction and setup are probably the biggest factors in determining the later success of the story, since 99-percent of the script is purely character-driven.

So how to go about changing the intro? Well, you have a number of options, but the basic plan should be to establish only the incidents that will either a) help describe Aaron's character in a way that specifically reveals information we need to know throughout the script, and/or b) introduce the characters that will substantially factor in to his life. Anything more will, in all likelihood, spoil the pacing and "balance" of the story. Subplots like his sister getting pregnant, or showing her interact with her friends distracts from Aaron. Albeit those scenes allow us to witness that broader family dynamic, they're largely expendable. The second part of structural editing revolves around the core of the plot. Unless you have something else in mind, the screenplay ought to focus *exclusively* on Aaron, meaning most every scene should be intimately tied to his progression or illustration as a conflicted character.

Admittedly, it can be extremely tough attempting to imagine a fresh plot and simultaneously preserve the themes and messages you have already grounded. And by all means, keep the social commentary intertwined in the script. No need to change the concept, just the *execution* of the concept. The following are some suggestions on alternative plotlines, taking into consideration the creation of a protagonist with a single goal, a simpler and more cohesive structure, and the safeguarding of your fundamental premise:

1) You've drawn a strong parallel between Aaron's attraction to film and becoming a critic and how some of the movies from the nineties indirectly parallel, in a thematic sense, his tribulations, so one thought would be to utilize that as a structural facet. The story could open with Aaron as a pre-teen, fascinated by films, showing one or two brief scenes that set up his love for movies, his abilities in the pool, and his tendencies toward

homosexuality. This should take up, roughly, three to four pages, if not less. Then, flash forward eight or 10 years to college, and that's where the story begins. Aaron is a swim star for Devries. He has three close friends, one of which, a girl, he's highly attracted to. In order to keep his scholarship, he can't deviate from his schoolwork or, most importantly, his responsibilities as an athlete. But his sexuality, and identity confusion, gets in the way. He ends up in a relationship with Karen, and then when she breaks it off, his life crumbles. Maybe he gets kicked out of school, or drops out. Turns to the seedy gay nightclub scene, attempts to regain his life by joining the Rainbow Games, where he's influenced by Evan. You can then interweave Karen in the story so that she plays an active role with Aaron figuring out what he wants from life, in the face of an HIV-positive diagnosis. The main objective here, though, is that Aaron experiences a fall from grace due to his sexual preference. Accordingly, he must climb his way back to the prominence he had at Devries, without ruining himself in the process.

2) As a child, Aaron learns what it takes to be a "good" Christian. He's raised to know what's right and wrong. However, a childhood experience with a friend establishes that he may be gay. When he gets to college, those thoughts are confirmed. Now, he must battle with his faith, his family, his swimming teammates, and his own self-doubts, especially when he discovers he has contracted HIV. His only outlet that prevents him from breaking down: films. The style of the script could then become a hybrid of sorts, a cross between traditional storytelling and a structure integrating voice-over (those times where Aaron discusses films) that allows us to gain access into Aaron's mindset. Aaron, as maybe an amateur college film critic, would use current cinema as a channel to vent his own frustrations and achieve his goal, in this case, to get his life back together, possibly make peace with his parents, and determine who he is before his rapidly-deteriorating health fully declines. Then, if you're adding voice-over intermittently, you could have Aaron recounting those final moments prior to his death. This would be a far more ambitious plotline, in that the conflict is almost exclusively internal, but could make for an engaging and poignant character study.

These are two of literally a hundred different potential variations on the script. Both suggestions encompass what you already have, but the trick here is to pick a particular plot and concentrate on developing that and only that. Think less biopic (from childhood to death) and more along the lines of selecting the most intriguing piece of Aaron's life and expanding upon that. Though it's commendable you're saying a lot with the script, both thematically and plot-wise, there are too many things going on at once. Simplify as much as you can. At some point, once you have a definitive structure, you can begin assimilating flashbacks or other advanced techniques to polish the plot and narrative design, but for now, concentrate only on fostering a basic skeleton for the premise.

Remember, too, that brief "throwaway" scenes can be condensed or excluded altogether. For example, on P. 66, the comic book store and jewelry store moments can be edited out. There should be another method of revealing this information, if you need to. Likewise, shorten scenes wherever possible, such as on P. 24-26 at Devries. The purpose there is to introduce some characters and depict Aaron's life in college, for the most part. So technically, you can trim this scene to maybe a page, no more than a page and a quarter.

On a stylistic note, there are a couple series of shots sections that don't quite have the intended effect you were aiming for (e.g. P. 97-98). They run the risk of coming off awkward or choppy on-screen. Could they be consolidated to one scene?

CONFLICT / STAKES: A new structure will of course change the type of conflict, so this is an area to consider when rebuilding the plot. Aaron shares loads of internal conflict, yet, with the exception of a handful of very brief scenes, we don't get to see those inner-emotions take shape. What are his past personal demons?

How do they manipulate him to the point where his present and future is put into jeopardy? Seeing as how they play a very minor part in the script, can Aaron's parents play a role? External conflict shouldn't be ignored either. For example, let's say you choose to develop a plotline where most of Aaron's conflict is internal (i.e. option #2 above). External factors can still exist—his parents pressuring him to be someone he's not, his homosexual friends placing unwarranted stress on him to drop out of school . . . whatever it may be—so long as they correlate explicitly to his goal/s. In this draft, conflict feels forced, and much of the reason for that is due to a disjointed structure and a plot without a clear and defined direction.

Similar to conflict, the stakes must be taken into account as well. What is Aaron putting on the line? Certainly, if his goals and motivations are vague, the stakes will be low, if not nonexistent. Raise the stakes for him as high as you can. Will he risk anything by coming out to his friends? Will he get kicked off the Devries swim team, lose his scholarship, and be ostracized by his peers? He falls in love with Karen, but what will happen if he loses her, besides a broken heart? Look at the time period as context. You obviously have proven that you understand the nineties, which is great, by the way. There was a slightly different attitude toward homosexuality in the first few years of the decade. Let the attitudes of the era seep through Aaron's struggles. Upping the stakes may accomplish this and contribute to shaping the script as a decade-specific story, one that is a byproduct of a major era in American social history.

TONE: Nothing here that flirts with breaking realism. You do a good job of painting a vivid and plausible portrait of Aaron, his friends, and the situations that follow. Only thing to ponder in subsequent drafts is character consistency. No matter how and if you change Aaron's character, we must look upon him as a rationale person, for the most part. Looks like you understand how to properly set this up and develop a believable character, though. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any incongruities in plot or anachronisms given the fact it takes place in the 1990s.

DIALOGUE: Structure and characterization are tops, but dialogue is a close second when it comes to editing. Dialogue fulfills its purpose here—it's never overtly long-winded, nor do conversations constantly overstay their welcome. Two principal aspects of dialogue to reflect on: the expression of exposition and the intention of scenes/interactions. First, limit blatant exposition. Usually, this occurs during phone discussions or Aaron speaking with his family, such as on P. 64 when Nana Clara dies. Leave it to just a few words from Aaron, since you're cutting to her funeral soon afterwards. As was mentioned, yes, there are certain times when you have to depend on dialogue to get across the mood of a scene or impression of a character, but the only trap to watch out for are those lines that are obviously exposition added strictly for our benefit. At this stage, too, the voice-over doesn't work. On the other hand, with a revised plot, it can. Best to keep it fairly concise, though. Above all, realize that dialogue serves one purpose (with the exception of humor if you're writing a comedy): to move the story forward. Therefore, remove any lines or interactions that do not progress the plot or the development of a character.

OTHER CONCERNS:

- Script looks good from a presentation standpoint. Only minor, negligible typos remain. Should be an easy fix, but don't run a technical edit until you've smoothed out other elements.
- Best advice would be to first write an outline of a revised plot. Then, you can review the outline (or treatment) and made adjustments as need prior to writing out the script.

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You may request to have **xxx** re-evaluated at any time (select the Development Notes or General Review option online, or have our coordinator process registration manually by emailing notes@scriptpipeline.com direct). You may choose the original evaluator (if available), a fresh read, or no preference.