10 Biggest Mistakes I See in Early Drafts

From the hundreds of screenplays I have read, these are mistakes I see again and again from novice screenwriters. Luckily, we can all learn from our mistakes.

1) THE SCRIPT ISN'T FUN!
If we're going to read a script from beginning to end, it should be a fun read. If it's a horror, make us scared. If it's a comedy, make us laugh. We go to the movies because it's fun, so make sure your script is fun.

2) TOO MUCH ACTION DESCRIPTION
Amateur writers often use way too much action description. It slows the pace of the script, and so often, a lot of that action description isn't needed.

3) ON-THE-NOSE DIALOGUE
We can forgive a little on-the-nose dialogue, but if a script is full of it, then it shows a lack of creativity from the writer.

4) BAD HANDLING OF EXPOSITION
If characters are talking in paragraphs about their backstory, and it's clear exposition just to get the exposition out, then it's not fun. Make sure the exposition is handled through moments where we don't realize this is exposition.

5) SHOW, DON'T TELL
Why have your protagonist tell us about a moment when we can see it? If something life-changing happened to your protagonist, then show it to us! Don't just talk about it. We might not remember every piece of dialogue, but we'll remember a scene that changed the protagonist.

6) NOT KNOWING WHEN TO FADE IN AND WHEN TO FADE OUT
There should only be one FADE IN at the top of the script and one FADE OUT at the very bottom of the film. Amateur writers put more of these in the middle of their scripts.

7) KEEP IT LESS THAN 110 PAGES (ESPECIALLY IN COMEDY)
Sure, there's an exception to this, but you're story better be incredible. A script from a first-time writer that's 124 pages is just a headache to a reader. For the most part, people don't want to read scripts over 100 pages. If a reader has the choice to choose a screenplay that's 94 pages and a screenplay that's 115 pages, they're much more likely to choose the 94-page script.

8) COMEDIES NEED TO BE FUNNY
Comedies need to be a mix of great stories and great laughs. If you're gonna submit a comedy, make sure we laugh. Pump up the jokes in scenes that need more jokes before submitting.

9) CHARACTERS HAVE SIMILAR NAMES
Don't have a Josh, Jake, John, and Jeff! Make sure every character has a different name than your other characters. It gets confusing when you keep reading names that start with the same initial.

10) THE FIRST 10 PAGES ARE BORING
The first 10 pages of a screenplay are the most important. They have to hook the reader to want to read the rest of the screenplay. Once we are hooked, it's easier to forgive other parts of the screenplay, but if we're not hooked, then we'll pass on the screenplay.

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