

How To Pitch A Movie – A Movie Pitch Example



Written by Stephanie Palmer Stephanie Palmer was a film executive with MGM Pictures and The Hollywood Reporter named her one of the “Top 35 Executives Under 35.” She is the author of the best-selling book Good in a Room. She has helped many writers get agents and managers...[More About Stephanie](#)

You know (or you’re learning) [how to write a screenplay](#) – but do you know how to pitch a movie?

What you’re about to see is the first phase of researching and developing a movie pitch.

In the following movie pitch example, you’ll see how to write a movie pitch – and that a great deal of work goes into choosing just a few words.

Step 1: Draft The Initial Short Pitch

The first step to learning how to pitch a movie is to draft a movie pitch (it can be rough).

Try the following formula with five elements:

“My story is a (genre) called (title) about (hero) who wants (goal) despite (obstacle).”

I like starting with this formula because it forces the clarification of the dramatic conflict.

Typically, a story that is clear can be framed in terms of an entity (the hero) that is seeking something (the goal) despite some significant problem (the obstacle).

Using the formula, here's my client's initial pitch:

It's a comedy called Nerd Ops about the National Security Administration's nerdiest technical people who must become field operatives to save the world from a terrorist hacker organization.

Step 2: Identify Possible Genres

Genre gives context to the project, suggests a structure for the story, and has implications for budget, scope, and potential revenue. The 1-2 words you use to categorize your project, therefore, should be chosen with care.

You may already know how your project should be categorized.

If not, here's a way to generate ideas for genre descriptions:

- Go to boxofficemojo.com;
- Look for produced projects that are the most like your idea;
- See how they are classified.

For *Nerd Ops*, is “comedy” the best description of genre? Could we find something more specific?

Here are some other possible genres:

- Dark comedy
- Buddy comedy

- Action comedy
- Spy comedy

Step 3: Identify Themes

While I do believe that it's important for a finished project to have one core thematic premise, at this stage of our movie pitch example we're interested in looking at themes more broadly.

Here are some themes that I could see being relevant:

- Weaknesses can be strengths (and strengths weaknesses)
- Warriors for the 21st century
- The brotherhood (and sisterhood) of geekdom
- Humans vs. machines

Step 4: Identify Structural Elements

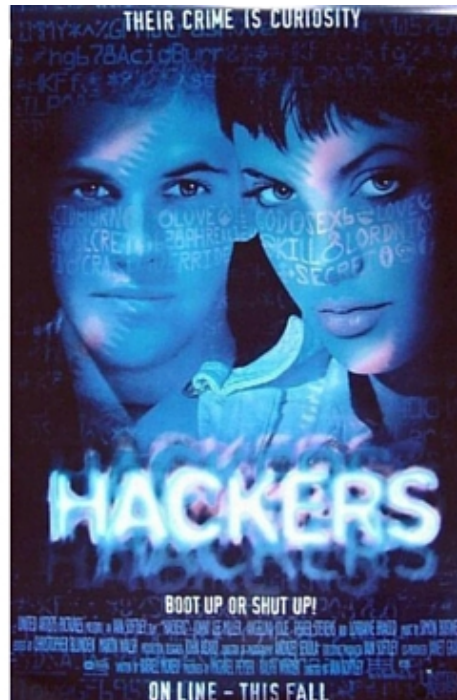
Structural elements are obvious, relevant aspects of the project but not themes.

Some structural elements of this story could be:

- The culture of elite hackers
- The NSA recruiting process
- "Hell Week" SEAL training
- Powerful supercomputers

Step 5: Brainstorm Comparisons

Let's generate more projects to which *Nerd Ops* could be compared:



- *Spies Like Us* (Dan Ackroyd's character is a technical genius)
- *Hackers* (elite hackers work together)
- *The Other Guys* (desk jockey cops become field agents)
- *Stripes* (oddballs in the military)
- *Mission Impossible 3&4* (technical geek played by Simon Pegg)
- *The Recruit* (Colin Farrell's character is a math genius)
- *GI Jane* (the structure of "Hell Week")

Step 6: Build A Table To Hold Comparison Data

What we're going to do now is build a spreadsheet. Along the way, we're going to get ideas for more comparison projects and we'll add those to our spreadsheet.

Set up a table with twenty rows and nine columns. Those nine columns should read: Title, Genre, Rating, Release Date, Buyer/Distributor, Domestic Box Office (DBO), International Box Office (IBO), Total Box Office (TBO), Pitch.

Step 7: Fill In The Table

First, I'll search boxofficemojo.com for *Spies Like Us*.

I'll enter the data in my table, then click on the tab for "Similar Movies." This shows me that there's a project called *This Means War* that I hadn't considered. So I'll click on that and enter the data. Then, I'll click on the tab for "Similar Movies," and repeat the process.

Then, I'll look for summaries of the projects on imdb.com. I highlight them, edit if needed, paste into a text file to remove formatting, then cut and paste into my table.

The important thing is to collect the data in one place so you can look for patterns.

My table looks like this: [Good in a Room Nerd Ops Spreadsheet Example](#)

Step 8: Sort The Table And Look For Patterns

Now, sort the table with the highest grossing projects at the top.

The point is not to be a slave to the box office and to copy exactly movies that have been successful.

Rather, it's to have the same information that the decision-maker has, and to be able to customize your movie pitch using that information to showcase what's original about your project in a way that is compelling to the listener.

Looking at our table, we can start to see patterns:

- *Nerd Ops* would be more clearly described as an action comedy rather than a spy comedy (e.g. *Austin Powers*, *Bean*).

- The top grossing action comedies are either romantic comedies or buddy pics (e.g., *Knight and Day*, *Rush Hour*, *The Other Guys*)
- Characters who are “desk-jockeys” or “prodigies.”
- Two male heroes.
- A PG-13 rating.
- Titles with 2-3 words.

Step 9: Improve Your Movie Pitch

Here’s the old short pitch, then the new one:

Old Movie Pitch:

It’s a comedy called Nerd Ops about the National Security Administration’s nerdiest technical people who must become field operatives to save the world from a terrorist hacker organization.

New Movie Pitch (changes in bold):

*It’s an **action comedy** called Nerd Ops about **two competing** National Security Administration **computer prodigies** who must become field operatives and **work together** to save the world from a terrorist hacker organization.*

Commentary On This Movie Pitch Example

To a new writer, these changes may not seem like such a big deal.

However, to an agent or a decision-maker who could buy the project, they are a MAJOR deal.

Two significant things to notice about the new movie pitch:

1. Action comedies have a different market than comedies – both inside the US and especially outside the US. This change of genre has huge implications for audience, budget, marketing, and distribution.
2. Centering the story on two heroes establishes that there will be two roles for stars rather than having it be an ensemble cast that may not interest the biggest stars.

This is how you sell a screenplay – by learning how to pitch a movie, choosing your words with extreme care, and speaking in the language of the decision-maker.

What If Your Pitch Doesn't Sell?

Pitching, like writing, directing, or producing, is a big, complex topic.

It takes time to learn how to pitch a movie and more time to get good.

So if your pitch doesn't help you make a sale or get hired, it could be that:

- Your pitch isn't compelling enough.
- Your story is flawed.
- You're not handling the meeting dynamics well.
- You're not meeting with the right people.

Don't Keep Pitching If It's Not Working

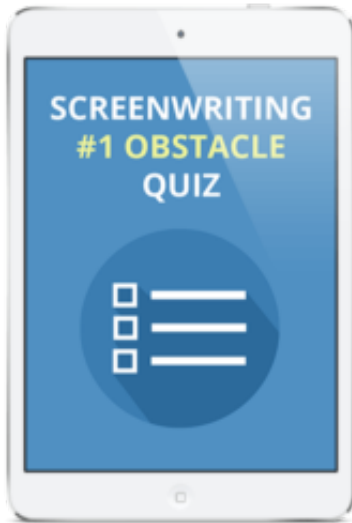
When you are at the point where you are pitching your project to decision-makers, your success or failure in those meetings makes a big difference to your career.

If you're not making sales or getting hired, it may be time to take a step back.

Take the time to learn how to pitch a movie. Make sure you're getting in the

right rooms with the right people. And be ready for the [pitch meeting](#) dynamics so you know exactly what to say when you get there.

Do You Know the #1 Screenwriting Obstacle that is Holding You Back?

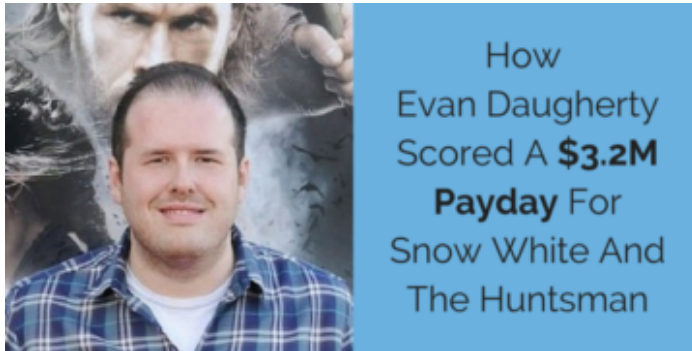


Almost Every Screenwriter Struggles with 1 of 3 Common Obstacles. Take the Quiz to Find Out Yours.

[Take 1 Min Quiz](#)



[Genre – Story Congruency: "Snow White and the Huntsman" vs "Mirror Mirror"](#)



[How Screenwriter Evan Daugherty Scored a \\$3.2M Payday for "Snow White and the Huntsman"](#)