

# Netflix Pitch Workshop

Notes from the [workshop hosted by Stage 32](#).

## Story Questions

### Basics

"Of the total creative effort represented in a finished work, 75% or more of a writer's labour goes into designing story. Who are these characters? What do they want? How do they go about getting it? What stops them? What are the consequences? Finding the answers to these grand questions and shaping them into story is our overwhelming creative task." – Robert McKee

Rephrasing the last two questions:

- What are the central conflicts?
- What are the stakes?

Don't try to write for everybody, because that's a moving target. Instead, try to come up with the most creative, provocative answers to these questions.

Repeat this exercise for all your main characters. And if your characters wants and needs are *diametrically opposed*, that also creates tension and helps generate stories.

### Case Study: Breaking Bad

- Who is Walter White?
  - A down-on-his-luck chemistry teacher who is diagnosed with cancer.
- What does he want?
  - External: money, to pay for his treatment and provide for his family.
  - Internal: to be 'awake'. He's been dormant for so long, he's forgotten how to live.

You want your character to be *layered*. You want them to have an external goal (wants), but also an *internal* goal (needs) – which they might even be aware of.

- How does he go about getting it?
  - Cooking and selling the purest meth in New Mexico.
- What are the central conflicts?
  - Family; drug dealers; the law.

- What are the stakes?
  - Divorce (loss of family); death (loss of life); jail (loss of freedom).

Central conflicts generate story! In this case, the writers can generate stories from all three of these central conflicts, all with very high stakes. These underlying tensions are why *Breaking Bad* can have so many scenes involving just two people sitting in a room.

## Theme

An additional question: what are the themes?

- Theme: the central idea the author is trying to convey to the audience.
  - Alternatively: what's your story about, without describing the plot?
  - Ask a big question about life.
- Also: what are you trying to say about your theme? For example, if your story is about revenge, are you saying that it's good or that it's bad?
- If the story is your path to the end, the theme will be your map.
  - It should inform every decision all of your characters make.
- Try it this way: "My story is about..." + your central theme.
  - *Breaking Bad* is a story about how greed and power can corrupt the soul.

Take a few attempts to come up with your theme, because your first answer might not be the best one. Challenge yourself to come up with the best answer possible.

## The Themes of Humanity

- Love, obsession, hate
- Greed, envy, sacrifice
- Fear, courage, redemption
- Loyalty, betrayal, revenge
- Good, chaos, evil

## Overview

The overview includes a **short synopsis**, and the answer to the question **why this series?**

## Synopsis

You will find the outline for your synopsis in the answers for your story questions.

- Who is the hero and what do they want?
- Why now, and what happens if they don't get what they want?

- What is the central conflict?

Keep it short! Just one paragraph. Think *elevator pitch*.

- Fight the instinct to make it an information dump.
- No backstory on characters.
- Don't get into character dynamics.

If you have an ensemble like *Friends*, you don't need to go into detail on each character: "A group of friends in New York, who explore friendships, love and joblessness."

### Case Study: *Breaking Bad*

*Breaking Bad* is a family drama about a down on his luck, high-school chemistry teacher who turns to cooking meth in order to provide for his family after he is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Armed with his intellect and the best meth on the market, he will outsmart rival drug kingpins and the DEA to become the biggest, baddest drug dealer in New Mexico. The only thing that scares him more than being killed or being locked up is being found out by his pregnant wife and teenage son. *Breaking Bad* will explore the themes of family, greed and power.

Note: this is *not* the actual synopsis.

- The first sentence has the *who*, *what* and *why* of your series, so the reader immediately knows what kind of character will be driving your story.
  - Notice that the genre is identified upfront: *family drama*.
- Central conflicts: "he will outsmart rival drug kingpins and the DEA..."
- The stakes: "the only thing that scares him more than being killed or being locked up is being found out by his pregnant wife and teenage son..."
- Themes: "family, greed and power".

### Why this series?

- What makes the story fresh?
- Are there any relevant hotbed issues being explored?
- Is it personal? Are you the only person who can tell this story?
- Is it based on existing IP?
- Tell us more about the themes.