

1) Intention & Obstacle

- Don't just write dialogue → think about **intention** & **obstacle**
- Ex: leisure car ride across country w/ friends
 - ↳ Add intention: job interview, friend's wedding → has a deadline
 - ↳ Add obstacles: flat tires, lost, weather, ...
- Creates friction & tension
- **Press** on them → get audience on edge of their seat
 - If there are ways to get out easily, your obstacle isn't formidable enough
 - Your hero doesn't have to win - they just need to try
- How to show intention & obstacle?
 - You can state intention or both at the beginning
 - ↳ then continually introduce obstacles
- When to introduce?
 - TV: introduce ASAP
 - Movie: in between

2) Story Ideas

- An idea needs a "but then" ⇒ **conflict**
- No matter how shiny / interesting something is, it's not enough unless it has a conflict (ex: Houdini - cool guy, but no conflict)
 - ↳ conflict of equally strong ideas

- If you're attracted to a place → TV series (many seasons)
If your characters die/have no more story to tell → Feature
- You can start without an idea (like a blind date)
 - Genres, themes, topics, places you like
- Start with already broken plots
 - Practice dramatizing existing short stories whose plots have been broken

3) Rules of Story

- Best way to write: watch + read screenplays together
 - Choose your 5 favorite movies, and read their screenplays
- "Rules are what makes art/sports beautiful" (and not fingerpainting)
- Aristotle's Poetics is the rulebook
 - You can also absorb his rules by being a diagnostician
 - Figure out why something did / didn't work
- Many rules are wrong - only rules are rules of drama

4) Film Story Arc

- Fact vs Story vs Drama
 - Fact: queen died
 - Story: queen died, then king died from broken heart
 - Drama: queen died, king lost intellectual power in her & now
↓
needs conflict must fight for throne
- 3 act structure

① Chase hero up a tree	② Throw rocks at them	③ Cut them down/ Die in tree
---------------------------	--------------------------	---------------------------------

- Must introduce tools to help hero early (in Act 1, not 3)
- Set **stakes** as high as possible
- **Exposition** is tricky
 - Need at least 1 character who knows as little as the audience
 - "As you know..." is BAD
- Then, lead into **inciting action**
- Use page numbers to track acts / pace
 - Voiceover & dialogue add to page #s
 - 1st 15 pages are most important

5) The Audience

- The audience isn't just watching, they're participating
- Treat your audience as intelligent
 - ↳ don't make up / throw unbelievable stuff
- Don't confuse them either

6) Writing Habits

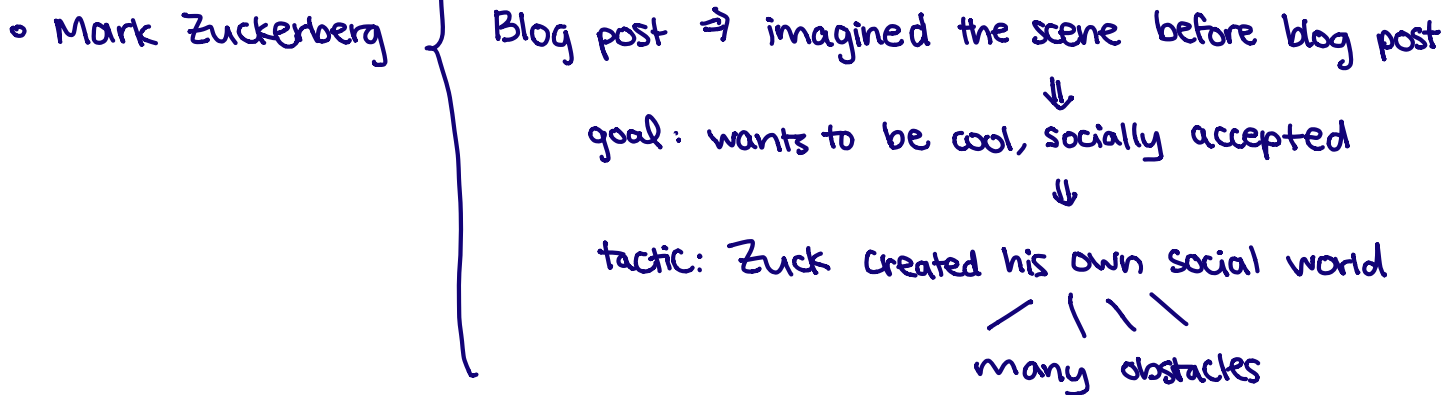
- Usually, screenplays take him 18-24 months
 - Most is spent preparing to write (research, interviews, brainstorm, block)
 - Writing / typing = 3 months
 - Start with the 1st scene
 - Use tools to organize writing (i.e. FinalDraft, index cards, corkboard)
 - Write like yourself - don't lose your voice & style
 - Writers' block is common
 - listen to music
 - celebrate progress
- MOST DAYS YOU DON'T WRITE ⇒ NEED TO MENTALLY DEFEAT
 need to feel good when you write

WRITING MEMORABLE CHARACTERS & DIALOGUE

1) Developing Characters

- Character is born from intention & obstacle

↳ What tactics does character use to overcome obstacle?



- Do NOT write long biographies

- Every detail should be **connected** to intention & obstacle

- Character was never 5 years old - they're born when the movie **starts** (unless explicitly stated / flashback)

- Little details distract from storyline, intention, & obstacle

- Write **characters**, not people

- BAD goal: write char. ⇒ as human as possible

↳ NO! That should be something inferred by audience

- Could lead to overkill

- Writing characters unlike yourself is hard ⇒ helps to fill writers' room with diverse voices & backgrounds

- Identify with your **anti-heroes**

- Do not judge them or hate them

- You need to make your case for them, why they believe & do what they do

2) Writing Captivating Dialogue

- Dialogue = most personal aspect of writing
- Dialogue is **music**
 - Cadence, tone, volume, **rhythm** ⇒ constant back & forth
 - How it sounds is just as important as what is said
- Don't imitate real people
 - The only "real" dialogue flows from improvisation
- Don't make them sound like they're on TV
- Be physical when you're writing dialogue
 - Play all the parts yourself
 - He once broke his nose writing dialogue
 - Perform to test the scenes
 - ↳ Are these words **speakeable**?
 - ↳ Did the jokes land? How does everything flow?


CREATING MOMENTUM: WRITING SCENES

- Purpose of a scene

- Move story **forward**
- By the end of a scene, you must be ≥ 1 step farther than where you were before



- How to go to next scene?

- 1) Next scene = answer a question asked in previous scene
- 2) Cut to something that counters an idea from prev. scene
- 3) ... many options! End of 1 scene must  next scene.

- **Reward patience**

- A scene must end with you wanting to keep going
- "If you stick with us until the end, the wait will pay off"

- Incorporating **comedy**

- There are specific comedic rules, e.g.:
 - Odd #'s are funnier
 - Words with 'k' sounds
- Do NOT Use people's appearances as jokes
- Best jokes are the ones you **don't see coming**
 - ↳ Set up early, reference much later

- Opening scenes

- 1) Lay the **theme**
- 2) Grab the audience

{
Begin in middle of conversations
Drop audience in fast paced situation
Crime scene → Title scene → Solve crime
etc.

- Character introduction scenes

- Set up intentions & obstacles

- ↳ **show** the audience: what does character **want**?

- ↳ do NOT: tell the audience facts about character

- Case study: scene from "Steve Jobs"

- ↳ The scene is exciting b/c:

- Conflict is clear ⇒ high stakes

- Strong intention & obstacle

- Revealed a lot about Steve & what he wants

- Competing tactics b/t Steve & Andy

- Director visualizes ↔ Screenwriter hears

PERFECTING THE DRAFT : RESEARCH & REWRITES

1) Research

- 2 kinds of research
 - Nuts & bolts
 - ↳ Factual, technical details
 - Find the movie
 - ↳ Talk with people to identify storyline, conflict, etc.
- **Talk** to as many people as you can
 - 1 hour usually suffices
 - ↳ Don't take too much of their time
 - ↳ Meet once usually, phone/email after
 - Gain their trust
 - Be direct : "Tell me something I don't know about ..."
- Meaningless research ⇒ over-detail, minute details
 - Sometimes helpful for actors

2) Incorporating Research

- Research helps you think about the characters as **humans**
- Researching lines of dialogue
 - Make sure they're correct (even if you don't understand)
 - Technical, vocation-specific language
 - ↳ Shows "these ppl know what they're talking about" more than audience does
- In non-fiction, you have to decide :

What is the more important truth of the story?

3) Rewrites: First Draft

- Get to the end before you rewrite
 - Don't stop & rewrite, you'll never finish
- Chip away anything that isn't the main conflict
 - At the end, ask yourself: did this matter?
 - That's how you cut 400-500 pages down
 - It's hard to kill things you love, but you need to

4) Rewrites: Notes

- Find your editors (script editors AND civilians)
 - Make sure others are not trying to write your script for you
- Listen for the **problem**, not the solution
 - Others might not know how to fix, but you should not ignore their reactions → you hurt your shoulder, you tell doctor to do surgery. Doctor listens to your symptom (problem), but not your suggestion (solution)
- Sorkin likes to **retype his whole draft** at some point
 - "Hedge against laziness"

LAST STEPS

1) Pitching a Screenplay

- Lay out intention, obstacle, conflict. Are they compelling?
- Who are your main characters?
- Is your story understandable? in < 60 secs
- For TV: prepare pilot, but know what happens in next few eps. [↑]
- Be prepared to answer questions like "does — have a love interest?"

2) Closing Thoughts

- Get used to tuning out other voices (esp. social media)
 - Never change your story for someone else
 - It's impossible to make everyone happy
- Once you get your foot in the door, don't forget to go back to your love: to write the story you wanted to write
- You're not writing things to be read, you're writing things to be performed