

PS: Well, you know, I don't start writing until I know the script from start to finish. Some writers find out what they're writing about by writing about it. I'm of the belief that there is nothing more debilitating for a screenwriter than to write scripts that don't get made. You write four or five scripts that don't get made and you lose faith in yourself. They're not published, they're not works of fiction, and you lose faith in yourself.

I'm of the belief that anything you can do to keep from writing is to your advantage. So that by the time you start to write, you're fully confident of what you're going to do. And this is what I was saying in Copenhagen, years ago.

What I do is I still use the same sort of method. You formulate a theme and you start breaking down your plot and then you start telling it. Screenwriting for me is part of the oral tradition. It's like telling a story. It's not like literature. So what you have to do is you have to start telling your story.

Question: Is that what you did in this case? Told the story?

PS: Well, in this case, there was a pre-existing book, so I didn't have to discover a lot of the plot but I would tell a story and then outline it.

Question: Do you still outline it in one page?

PS: Yeah. And then re-outline it. On this one I went right from the outline to the script. But usually, if I have any concerns about whether the idea is really going to work, I then go into a sequential breakdown.

All a sequential breakdown is.... let's say in an average movie there are anywhere 45 - 55 - 60 things happening. That's your outline, the list of things that happen. That's not the list of shots, or the list of scenes and drive-ups, just the things that happen. Like, they meet at the Chelsea Hotel, returns to office, make phone calls, whatever.

So you take each one of those items on your outline and make it into a paragraph. So now you're starting to include dialogue.

Question: 5 - 8 lines?

PS: Yeah. So now, instead of a one-page outline, you have about a 15 page, single-spaced breakdown. And if your idea still survives all of that, then there's a pretty good chance it'll work. I've had ideas that have worked at an outline stage, but died at the breakdown stage.

And when an idea dies on you it is, in fact, one of the best things that can happen. Because you've just saved yourself an enormous amount of time and grief. Some ideas just don't want to be written. They don't want to be written by you. Some ideas have fooled you into thinking that they have more power than they, in fact, do. If you find that out after writing a first draft, you've wasted a lot of time and you've also lost faith in yourself because you believed in something and you couldn't pull it off.