



Script Coverage.

*how readers
judge your script.*

A working field guide to script coverage: what a studio reader actually does with your screenplay, the logline, synopsis, and comments they write, the Pass, Consider, or Recommend verdict that travels in your place, the grid they grade you on, how to write a script that passes, and a printable self-coverage checklist to read your own draft cold before anyone else does.

How to use this guide.

read it once for the shape, then keep it open while you revise.

Script coverage is the first thing that happens to your screenplay after you send it out, and often the only thing. A reader, paid by the script, distills your work into a logline, a synopsis, and a page of comments, then grades it and files a verdict. The executive reads that report. Most never open the script itself.

There is no single author to credit here; coverage is a shared working practice, run much the same way across studios, agencies, and production companies, and it has changed little in decades. What follows is One More Draft's plain walkthrough of it: what goes in the report, what the reader is really checking, why so few scripts clear the bar, and how to read your own draft the way a reader will. A running example, an invented thriller called **Deadhead**, is covered piece by piece so you can see what real coverage looks like. This is a reference guide, and it ends with a printable self-coverage checklist rather than a fill-in planner.

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What script coverage is.

the first gate. a paid reader, a short report, and a verdict.

Script coverage is the standardized evaluation a reader writes after reading your screenplay, usually once and usually against the clock. On one to three pages it captures the logline, a synopsis of the plot, a page of comments on how the script works, and a graded verdict. It is the industry's book report, and it exists so that a busy executive can absorb a hundred and thirty pages in ninety seconds. They read the coverage. They rarely read the script.

That is the fact worth sitting with. A reader may cover several scripts in a day, so the report is built as a filter, a way to protect an executive's attention from the overwhelming number of scripts that are not for them. From the moment it is written, your screenplay travels as its coverage. The report goes up the chain, gets forwarded, gets remembered; the pages stay in the drawer. Your script becomes a paragraph and a grade, and that paragraph is what people decide on.

Coverage is an internal document, written for the company and not for you. You almost never see the one filed on a blind submission, and it is candid precisely because it assumes you never will. But you can commission coverage on your own draft, and you can learn to write it yourself, and doing so before you submit is the entire point of this guide. Read your script the way a reader will, and you get to fix what they would have failed.

THE ONE-SENTENCE VERSION

Coverage is a reader's one-to-three-page report - logline, synopsis, comments, and a graded verdict - that stands in for your screenplay in every room it enters, which is why the report, not the script, decides what happens next.

Who reads it, and why.

the reader is not your enemy. their incentives are just not yours.

The reader is usually junior and often freelance, paid a modest flat fee per script, working through a stack. They are not a gatekeeper by temperament, and picturing them as a hostile judge will steer you wrong. They are a filter by function, and understanding the two pressures they work under tells you almost everything about how to pass them.

The first pressure is to protect the executive. A reader who recommends a weak script, and sends a busy boss to spend an evening on it, spends their own credibility; do it twice and the notes stop being trusted. The second pressure pulls the other way: every reader wants to be the one who found the gem, the person who pulled the great script off the pile. So they read hoping to fall in love and braced to say no, and both hopes are real at once. They are looking for a reason to champion you, not for an excuse to reject you.

This is why “not bad” is a Pass. The bar is not competence. A clean, professional, perfectly readable script with nothing in it to fight for earns a Pass, because a reader can only recommend what they can argue for, and there is nothing here to argue. The absence of flaws is not a case. You are not trying to avoid giving the reader a reason to say no; you are trying to hand them a reason to say yes.

WHAT THE READER IS BALANCING

- Protect the executive’s time. A false rave is more costly to a reader than a hundred honest passes.
- Find the gem. The reader who discovers the script everyone wanted is the one who gets promoted out of the reading chair.
- Spend the yes carefully. A verdict is a bet with the reader’s name on it, so it takes a genuine strength to earn one.

Pass, Consider, Recommend.

three words decide everything. one of them is almost never used.

Every report ends in one of three words, and the whole apparatus of logline, synopsis, and comments exists to justify the choice. The vocabulary is small on purpose, so that a verdict can be read at a glance and acted on without a meeting.

PASS

Not for us. This is the overwhelming majority of coverage, and it is not an insult; it is the default a script has to earn its way out of. A Pass can mean the writing is weak, but far more often it means the writing is fine and the reader simply found nothing to carry upstairs. Most Passes are competent scripts with no reason to say yes.

CONSIDER

Worth a look, with reservations. The script has a real strength a reader can point to, and real problems alongside it. Consider is where a promising draft lives, and it is the honest ceiling for most good-but-flawed scripts. Some houses split it, marking the script Consider while flagging the writer as one to watch even if this particular script does not sell.

RECOMMEND

Read this now. It is rare, deliberately so; a reader who hands out Recommends stops being believed, so the word is spent with real caution and often only a handful of times a year. A Recommend is not “very good.” It is “I am putting my name on this,” and it moves a script to the top of the pile the same day.

THE TWO-COLUMN VERDICT

Many companies grade the **script** and the **writer** separately. A script can Pass while the writer earns a Consider on voice alone, which is how a failed spec still lands its author a meeting. You are always being read on two tracks: this story, and whether you can write the next one.

The coverage report.

one report, four moving parts. know what each one is testing.

A coverage report is short and rigidly shaped, and knowing the shape lets you write toward it. The next pages walk through the four parts in turn, covering one invented script, **Deadhead**, a piece at a time. Each part answers a different question, and a script has to survive all four; a great premise with a broken plot fails just as surely as a sound plot with no premise worth telling.

THE TOP OF THE REPORT

01	The logline	THE PREMISE
02	The synopsis	THE PLOT

THE HEART OF THE REPORT

03	The comments	THE CRAFT
04	The graded grid, and the verdict	THE CALL

Read the order as a funnel. The logline decides whether the premise is worth a reader's attention at all; the synopsis tests whether the story holds together once told plainly; the comments weigh the craft strength by strength and weakness by weakness; and the grid and verdict compress the whole judgment into five grades and one word. Each part narrows the field, and yours has to keep making the cut.

The logline.

they judge your premise before they judge your script.

The report opens by distilling your screenplay into a single sentence: protagonist, engine, and stakes, ideally with the flash of irony that makes a concept feel like a movie. This line is the first thing on the page and the first thing an executive reads, and it does something quiet and decisive. It renders a verdict on your premise alone, before a word of craft is weighed. If the reader cannot write a clean logline for your script, or if the one they write is dull, you have lost the room at the top of page one.

Two failures show up here. The first is a premise with no hook, a story that summarizes into a shrug, and no execution rescues it. The second is subtler and more painful: a strong premise that the script itself never delivers, so the reader's logline describes a better movie than the one they read. Write your own logline before you write the script, and again after, and make sure the finished draft earns the sentence that sells it.

DEADHEAD • THE LOGLINE, AS THE READER WROTE IT

"A widowed long-haul trucker who runs empty loads to dodge a debt she cannot pay finds a trafficked teenager locked in her trailer, and has one night to get him off the freight route before the crew that put him there, and the dispatcher she works for, realize she knows."

The synopsis.

the synopsis is where the reader tests whether the plot holds.

Next the reader lays out the story, opening to ending, in present tense and usually a few paragraphs. It gives away everything, the twist and the last image included, because it is not marketing; it is proof. Proof that the reader absorbed the script, and proof, to anyone reading above them, that the plot coheres when stripped of atmosphere and voice. The synopsis is the skeleton with the flesh scraped off, and either the skeleton stands or it does not.

This is where structural problems become impossible to hide. If the reader's summary has a gap, a motivation that arrives from nowhere, a climax the setup never earned, your script has that gap too, and the prose was only papering over it. Read the synopsis a reader writes and check it against the story you meant to tell. If the two do not match, the draft is telling the wrong one, and no amount of beautiful scene work will fix a spine that reads crooked in summary.

DEADHEAD • THE SYNOPSIS (OPENING MOVEMENT)

DELL ROURKE, a widowed trucker a year into grief and behind on a settlement she cannot pay, hauls empty loads west to stay invisible. At a night fuel stop outside Winnemucca she finds MATEO, fifteen, locked in her own trailer, and realizes her carrier has been routing her rig to move trafficked labor. With one night and three hundred miles to a cousin in Sacramento, Dell runs. At the state-line scale house she stops running and trips the weigh sensors on purpose, exposing the route and drawing the crew into the light. She loses the truck and gets the boy clear. In the last scene, for the first time in a year, she takes the exit toward home.

The comments.

the comments are the part an executive actually reads.

The comments are the paid heart of the report and the section worth studying hardest. Here the reader argues, in a page or so, for the verdict they are about to file: what works, what stalls, and why. The argument ranges across the whole craft, premise and structure and character and dialogue and marketability, and it is candid to a degree that can sting, because the writer is assumed to be nowhere near it. Every line is a note you could have caught yourself.

Good comments name a strength and a weakness and stay concrete about both, pointing to pages rather than waving at impressions. Read your own draft looking for the two paragraphs a reader would write, the honest case for it and the honest case against, and you will usually find the weakness paragraph writes itself first. That paragraph is your revision list. The mistake writers make is arguing with it; the move is to fix the thing it names before a stranger has to name it in a file you cannot answer.

DEADHEAD • A COMMENT, STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

Strength. *The writer owns this world. The trucking detail is specific and lived-in without stopping to explain itself, and Dell is a genuine lead, dry and competent and grieving in a way the script shows through behavior rather than speeches. The dialogue is clean and castable; the scale-house confrontation on page 88 is the kind of scene an actress signs on for.*

Weakness. *The premise is familiar, the reluctant guardian and the endangered kid, and the script does not escape that shadow until the route reveal on page 34, which is where the story actually begins. The first act lingers on Dell's backstory before Mateo appears, and the midpoint detour to the mechanic's yard stalls the very clock the premise works so hard to start. The bones are strong; the pacing is not yet.*

The graded grid.

five rows, four grades, one glance.

At the top of the report sits a small grid, a handful of craft categories each marked Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. The exact rows vary by company, but the standard spine is premise, structure, characters, dialogue, and tone or voice, and some houses add craft or marketability alongside them. The grid is the comments compressed into a scannable summary, the thing an executive's eye lands on before reading a sentence.

Two things about the grades are worth knowing. Excellent is genuinely rare, held back the way a Recommend is, so a row of Goods with one Excellent is a strong report, not a lukewarm one. And a single Fair in a load-bearing row, structure especially, can outweigh a page of praise, because a reader will not champion a script they cannot defend on its bones. Grade your own draft honestly across these rows and the weak one usually points straight at the fix.

- **Premise.** Is the concept fresh, and does it promise a movie people would line up for?
- **Structure.** Does the story build, turn on time, and pay off what it set up?
- **Characters.** Is the lead active and specific, and does the cast feel like people?
- **Dialogue.** Does it read clean, distinct per character, and free of on-the-nose telling?
- **Tone / Voice.** Is there a point of view on the page that only this writer would have?

DEADHEAD · THE READER'S GRID

Premise · **Good**

Structure · **Fair**

Characters · **Good**

Dialogue · **Excellent**

Tone / Voice · **Excellent**

Verdict · **Consider** (with reservations)

Pass, or Consider.

the line between them is a single reason to say yes.

Almost every script a writer submits is landing on one side or the other of this line, so it is the line worth understanding best. The reasons scripts get a Pass are specific and, mercifully, mostly fixable: a premise the logline cannot sell, an opening too slow to reach the story, a protagonist things happen to rather than one who acts, dialogue that says out loud what should stay under the surface, a familiar story told with no fresh angle. None of these is a talent verdict. Each is a craft problem with a known repair.

What tips a script from Pass to Consider is not the absence of those problems; a script can have several and still get a Consider. It is the presence of one genuinely excellent thing the reader can champion, a voice, a role an actor would fight for, a concept that will not leave them alone. A familiar premise with fresh, specific execution earns a Consider. The same premise told generically earns a Pass. Give the reader one true reason to say yes, then spend your revision clearing the reasons to say no.

DEADHEAD • WHY A CONSIDER, NOT A PASS

*The Pass version of this script is easy to imagine: the same premise, told generically, is a kid-in-danger thriller the reader has covered fifty times. What lifts **Deadhead** above it is execution the reader can point to, a real lead, a specific world, dialogue an actress would want to say. That is a reason to say yes, so it clears the bar. Fix the slow open and the saggy midpoint and the reader argues for a Recommend; leave them, and a tired reader on a Friday rounds it down to a Pass.*

Cover yourself first.

write your own coverage before someone who can say no does.

The single most useful thing you can do with everything in this guide is turn it on your own draft while you still control what happens next. Coverage is only fatal when it is the first coverage a script has ever had. Written by you, in advance, it is just a revision plan with the excuses removed. The goal is to meet the Pass in private, where you can still fix it, instead of in a file you never see.

Do it cold. Set the draft aside long enough to forget your intentions, then read it start to finish in one sitting, at reading speed, the way a reader will, without stopping to tinker. Then write the four parts yourself: the logline you would file, the synopsis in plain present tense, the two honest comment paragraphs, and the grid. The weakness you least want to write down is almost always the real note, and getting it onto the page before you submit is the whole game.

READ YOUR OWN DRAFT LIKE A READER

- Write the logline a stranger would, not the one you wish were true. If it needs the script to explain it, the premise is not landing.
- Summarize the plot in present tense and watch for the gap; the hole in your synopsis is the hole in your script.
- Name one real strength and one real weakness, and point to pages. Vague praise and vague worry both mean you have not read closely enough.
- Then get outside eyes. A trusted reader or a coverage service tells you whether your honest self-grade matches the one a stranger files.

Seven reasons scripts get a Pass.

read this list again before you call a draft finished.

- **1. A premise the logline can't sell.** The concept summarizes into a shrug, and no execution rescues a story no one can pitch. Fix: find the hook, the irony, the reason this movie has to exist, and build the logline before the script.
- **2. A slow first ten pages.** The reader decides fast, and setup with no engine reads as a script that has not started. Fix: open on motion and the premise, and move the backstory to where it is needed, not where it is comfortable.
- **3. A passive protagonist.** Things happen to a lead who reacts and waits instead of choosing and acting. Fix: give them a want, a plan, and decisions with cost; drive the plot with the hero, not the weather.
- **4. On-the-nose dialogue.** Characters say exactly what they feel and mean, and the subtext dies on the page. Fix: let them want one thing and say another, and cut any line that only exists to inform the audience.
- **5. A familiar story with no fresh angle.** The reader has covered this one many times and finds nothing new to champion. Fix: sharpen the specific world, voice, or lens that makes your version the one worth telling.
- **6. Formatting that flags an amateur.** Wrong margins, camera directions, novelistic action, typos on page one; the read is over before it began. Fix: use standard screenplay formatting and proofread cold, so nothing on the page says beginner.
- **7. No clear audience.** A script that does not know who it is for, its genre or its viewer, gives a reader nothing to sell upward. Fix: decide the genre and the audience, then make sure every scene serves the movie they came to see.

THE MASTER DIAGNOSTIC

For any draft that keeps earning a Pass in your own honest read, ask the reader's real question: what here could I champion? If you cannot answer in one specific sentence, the revision is not about removing flaws. It is about building the one thing worth saying yes to.

Your self-coverage checklist.

print this page. read your script cold, then fill it in.

MY LOGLINE (AS A READER WOULD WRITE IT)

PREMISE GRADE EXC / GOOD / FAIR / POOR

STRUCTURE GRADE EXC / GOOD / FAIR / POOR

CHARACTER GRADE EXC / GOOD / FAIR / POOR

DIALOGUE GRADE EXC / GOOD / FAIR / POOR

TONE / VOICE
GRADE

EXC / GOOD / FAIR /
POOR

THE HONEST WEAKNESS

MY PREDICTED VERDICT PASS / CONSIDER / REC

THE ONE FIX BEFORE SUBMITTING

Keep going.

the reading ends on this page. the revising starts in the editor.

The fastest way to survive a stranger's coverage is to have written your own first. Read your draft cold, grade it honestly across the five rows, and fix the one thing a reader would refuse to champion before you spend the submission. One More Draft is built to make that read, and the revision after it, easier to do.

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One More Draft is a complete workshop for screenwriters: industry-standard screenplay formatting with professional PDF export, a distraction-free workspace to write and revise, and a free desktop app for Windows. And Quill, your resident story editor, is on hand for a second read before you submit, so the first real coverage your script gets is not the one that decides its fate.

MORE FREE FIELD GUIDES

- How to Write a Logline · the one sentence that sells your script
- Screenplay Formatting Basics · the page that says professional
- Save the Cat · the fifteen-beat screenplay standard
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