

## Step 1: Get Some Seeds

So there's just you and this blank page that you can't seem to get a foothold on. Where on earth do you start?

You should do one or all of the following, as long as necessary:

- ❖ Think about people you know, and have:
  - Loved.
  - Been dumped by.
  - Been intrigued by.
  - Hurt.
  - Been Hurt by.
  - Felt sorry for.
- ❖ Lie in the bath. Lie in bed. Lie on the sofa. Let your mind drift. Get into a state of semi lucid dreaming. Wait for an image, or a character, or an event to pop up and make itself unforgettable.
- ❖ Think about things you have always wanted to see in a movie. Things that make you go Wow!
- ❖ Think about things that fascinate you. What are you obsessing about this week?
- ❖ Browse through old magazines and look at the photos. You need magazines with a strong human interest angle. I prefer newspaper supplements. National Geographic can be useful sometimes too.
- ❖ Go to your bookshelves. Find a book you liked. Liked a lot. Think to yourself – is there any bit of it I loved so much I want to give it new life?
- ❖ Think about films you've have seen. The same question. Any parts of that story that you loved, and want to get into your story? An opening? A character? A story twist? A story structure? <sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Oh, and if you're bothered by the thought that these last two suggestions seem like cheating, or stealing, please don't be. For one thing, this is a practical, warts and all insider's account of how writing is really done. For another, Shakespeare 'stole' many of his plots, and professional producers and writers 'borrow' plot moments all the time. (That may explain why so much of modern screen drama feels so terribly over familiar, but that's another discussion!) Anyway, by the time you've finished your screenplay you should be about a million

Somewhere in all that thinking there will be a starting point. By which I mean an image that interests you, or moves you, in a way that means you can't get it out of your head. A picture, an event, a situation between people.

### **What is Drama?**

Make it easy on yourself though and make sure this picture always includes people.

That's because the only definition of drama that works is 'Character in Conflict', and by far the best place to find complex, interesting characters is people.

### **Pictures Not Words**

But you should avoid moments that are all about conversations. You're looking for a real, concrete, in the world picture:

A man standing over a body with a bloody broken bottle. A kiss between mother and child. A kiss between two men. A young child painting a picket fence in scorching sunlight. An emaciated man being forced to walk barefoot over broken glass. A young woman blowing the dust off a long buried wooden chest.

Let your imagination run wild. But make sure there is a picture there. And make sure you personally find the picture absolutely charged with emotion. When you think about this image it should make you cry, or raging mad, or sick, or terrified to your core.

And don't worry about what other people might think of your ideas, just be honest to yourself. If you surprise yourself in admitting something you didn't know about yourself, great. Follow that thought!

### **Write It Up – Your First Required Software Tool**

Get this picture down in the word processor of your choice. I use Word for Windows, but it really isn't important which package you choose.<sup>2</sup>

Write without self censure, just free associate round that image till you run out of steam. How long you spend on

---

miles from your original source. Whatever you used in this way will have been long since absorbed and made new by your new work.

<sup>2</sup> [www.Openoffice.org](http://www.Openoffice.org) supplies a powerful and free word processor.

## Screenwriting Goldmine - Step 1: Get Some Seeds

this is up for grabs. You have to do fifteen minutes, or you haven't begun to put in the work. After a couple of hours I am rung dry and have nothing left to say even about the most intriguing image.

Now, as much as you can, forget about that image.

Get back in the bath, get back in your bed, go for another walk, whatever it takes to get back into your dream state. Do it again. Find another picture that moves you. Write about it.

Do this process a number of times, till you have a bank of images. Say eight or ten. This will give you the flexibility you need to drop images in and out later, and will let you pick images that seem to have a common theme.

### **Action Steps:**

1. Get into a semi-dream state.
2. Find an emotionally charged image.
3. Free associate round that image and write it up.
4. Repeat till you have 8-10 well developed images.

*Time taken: 1-3 days.*