

# FINISH YOUR DAMN SCRIPT

By April Yvette Thompson



[TheWritersRoom](http://www.AprilYvetteThompsonWritersRoom.wordpress.com)

- **FINDING THE TIME TO WRITE**

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO FIND THE TIME TO WRITE?

YOU SIT DOWN AND NOTHING COMES.

YOU NEED QUIET AND SPACE TO WRITE, BUT HOW DO YOU FIND THAT WHEN YOU HAVE LIFE RESPONSIBILITIES LIKE A FAMILY AND DEMANDING JOB?

**YOU DON'T WRITE BECAUSE  
YOU FEEL INSPIRED, YOU  
WRITE EVERYDAY SO  
INSPIRATION HAS A PLACE TO  
SHOW UP.**

**~APRIL YVETTE THOMPSON**

## **The 10 Minute Heist**

In order for the brain to function optimally, you should pause from your work every 90 minutes. Take a walk, have a cup of tea, take a bathroom break, stretch your neck from your chair.

Is there a meditation room in your office building? I used to work in banking which is high-stress and every building had a meditation room because there are lots of Muslims in banking. They pray 5 times a day. I think of writing as journaling, dreaming and praying.

Can you copy this habit, by taking time to use writing as prayer on these short 10 minute breaks?

If there's no mediation room, there's a bathroom and there's a stairwell and theres the bench outside in front of the starbucks where you take a quick break or a smoke.

## **Take Your WritersRoom with You Everywhere**

What if instead, you packed your thermos ( I invested in one of those insanely expensive thermoses from Whole Foods because the \$40 saved me buying coffee from Starbucks). I fill it in the morning and the reason its so expensive is because it keeps things hot for 10 hours. I fill it and pack it in my bag along with my mini composition book which I take everywhere and my laptop or Ipad.

So, instead of standing in a coffee line at Starbucks, I grab my writers bag, find a quiet spot and write for 10 minutes.

it can be done  
u just have  
to decide  
to do it

[AprilYvetteThompson.com/SoulFood](http://AprilYvetteThompson.com/SoulFood)

### **WHO IS APRIL & WHY SHOULD I LISTEN TO HER?**

**April Yvette Thompson** is a Tony-winning producer, writer, actor and coach working across media. April's most recent credits include the *Gotham* (dir. Paul. A. Edwards), the NBC pilot *Babylon Fields* (dir. Michael Cuesta) as well as, *Blue Bloods* (dir. David Barret). April's acting

credits include the feature film *The Teacher* (dir. Jeremy Engle) opposite Hunter Parrish (*Weeds*) and Clarke Peters (*The Wire*) filming in NYC now. Recently April guest starred on "Gotham" (FOX) and "Blue Bloods" (CBS). April starred in the smash Broadway hit, *Clybourne Park*, (Pulitzer & Tony for Best Play); as well as the revival of *The Exonerated* (dir. Bob Balaban) with Stockard Channing, Delroy Lindo & Roger Waters. Her off-broadway credits include *Medea*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antigone*, *Light Raise the Roof* and many others. April's Film/TV credits include *The Exonerated*, *Accidental Husband*, *Blue Caprice*, *Backwards*, *Babylon Fields*, "Law & Order" & "Third Watch, etc."

As SimonSays Entertainment Director of Development, April produces award-winning indie films. Her Sundance films have been in theatres nationwide and are currently available On Demand, NETFLIX & Amazon: *Blue Caprice* (starring Isaiah Washington), *Mother of George* (starring Danai Gurira), *Gun Hill Road* starring (Esai Morales & Judy Reyes). *Blue Caprice* was nominated for an Independent Spirit award for best first feature and . opened the prestigious New Directors/New Films festival at MoMA. *Mother of George* was named "best motion picture of the year" by Indiewire and won Best Cinematography at Sundance. In the Broadway producing world, April was on the Tony-winning producing team of the longest-running Broadway production of *Porgy & Bess*(Tony for Best Musical Revival) starring Audra MacDonald (Best Actress Tony).

As a playwright, April is developing her second play in The Miami Trilogy, *Good Bread Alley*, with support from NYSF, NYTW, Arsht. Her first play, *Liberty City* was an off Broadway hit at New York Theatre Workshop (creators of *Rent*, *Once the Musical*)and was nominated for Drama Desk, Outer Critics, Lortel & AUDELCO awards *Liberty City* has toured the United States and has it's Chicago premier in June 2015.

## **Education**

Bachelor of Arts, English from Vassar College

Master of Fine Arts, Theatre from Rutgers University

## **Why should you listen to me?**

That's a photo me below. I'm kinda cute, but more importantly, the stuff we're going to uncover today about structure and finishing your script come from my real life experiences as a writer/producer/actor.

I'm about to share examples of structural issues related to creating an outline that I've learned from my real life experiences producing the film *Blue Caprice* starring Isaiah Washington (it's available on iTunes & Netflix).



## **The Making of Blue Caprice**

**I was a creative  
producer on Blue  
Caprice**

**The story came to  
us with multiple  
locations and was  
the story of the  
relationship  
between this older  
man using the  
father/son bond to  
entangle a  
fatherless young  
boy in his warped  
delusions of  
grandeur.**

**and this young boy  
who had a**

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That's the story we were going to tell. The script had a solid relationship based on an amazing inciting incident. The problem with early drafts was that the script needed to work backward from the inciting incident (the D.C. Sniper killing spree), to build the trajectory of this troubled relationship that created the snipers in the first place. We all knew what the result was, but as a creative producer and artist/activist, I wanted a deeper spin on the story. It was all there in the script, it just needed fleshing out.

And that's what I do

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as SimonSays  
Entertainment  
Director of  
development.

I use this outline  
template to guide  
how I give detailed  
script notes to the  
writer to fine tune  
the story.

As a creative  
producer (you can  
learn more about his  
in the video series), I  
give notes in every  
stage of script  
development, from  
first draft to get us  
into pre-production,  
to notes while  
filming, because  
producers watch all  
the dailies (film  
that's been shot that  
day) at the end of  
each day and give  
notes to the director  
(if necessary) to  
make sure the

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filming is staying  
true to the story  
that's been written.

I then give notes  
when we're in post.  
While the film is  
being edited. You  
always wrap  
shooting, move into  
the editing room and  
learn that you  
actually filmed a  
different or more  
involved story than  
the one that was  
written. It's up to  
the director/editor  
and producers to get  
those two stories to  
jibe in the editing  
room.

Here's my outline  
format:

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**I. PLOT POINT I - prompted by the inciting incident  
Problem**

**A. PROTAGONIST AND HIS OR HER GOAL**

a.) describe scene: what happened, what's the conflict.

**B. antagonist and his goal is in direct opposition to what the protagonist**

a) describe the conflict

**C. By the end of the scene,**

a) what has happened,

b) what has the protagonist learned

c) how are they changed and what new problem has been created.

**II. Plot Point II is prompted by Plot Point I and follows the same format as Plot Point I**

**Plot Points II-VI are all the same.**

**VI. Plot Point VI is the first act break**

**A. FIRST ACT BREAK ENDS WITH PROBLEM THAT HAS TO BE SOLVED BEFORE THE STORY ENDS**

a) protagonist goal

b) antagonist goal

**C) super block to the protagonist success....this problem cannot be resolved until the protagonist overcomes his fatal flaw.**

**VII. POINT OF COMMITMENT**

**A. CHARACTER REAFFIRMS GOAL BY ESTABLISHING WHAT'S AT STAKE**

**B. DECIDES NEXT VITAL STEPS THAT HAVE TO BE TAKEN**

**VIII. ALL IS LOST**

**A. CREATES FOUNDATION FOR THE CLIMAX, SO THIS IS A MINI CLIMAX EN ROUTE**

**B. INSURMOUNTABLE PROBLEM HAS BEEN CREATED**

## **C. END OF ACT II**

### **IX. CLIMAX**

- A. CHARACTER'S FATAL FLAW IS REVEALED**
- B. FATAL FLAW MUST BE OVERCOME TO SOLVE THE INSURMOUNTABLE PROBLEM**
- C. SHOWDOWN BETWEEN PROTAGONIST AND ANTAGONIST**

### **X. RESOLUTION**

- A. HERO HAS SOLVED PROBLEM**
  - 1a. How is the hero changed by the end of the story?**
- B. WORLD IS IN BALANCE AGAIN**

This is what I hand to writers when they give me a script. Because if you follow these steps the script writes itself. Why? Because this is basic story format. It encompasses the major structural points that have to be realized in order for a script to make sense, for the reader or viewer to enter into the story, empathize with the protagonist and stay connected to the action of the story. Here's how I know this outline works.

This is *Blue Caprice* stars Isaiah Washington, Cassandra Freeman, J.W. Cortes, April Yvette Thompson ( I was also in the film), Director Alex Mores, producers Kim Jackson, Rons Simons & April Yvette Thompsoncast, director and stars of Blue Caprice which opened the prestigious New Directors/New Films Festival at the Museum of Modern Art. This goodness happened after an amazing Sundance premier where we sold the film to IFC.



## **How do I use the Outline to Write Quickly (like 10 mins if that's all the time I have)**

First off, give yourself a break. A few paragraphs a day is writing. It's not about how much you wrote that day, it's did you write today, each and every day. I want you to take that subway or train ride to write 10 minutes or that coffee break.

Take Plot Point I and resolve that this week, you are going to only deal with plot point I. If you write down the points that need to be covered, then instead of writing an entire manuscript, each day, you're describing in one sentence what each scene is going to be about.

If you do this for 10 minutes each day, you can finish more than Plot Point I in a week, but let's just set that as our baseline. So, your outline becomes a template where you're just plugging in ideas.

It becomes a map to keep you on task with the story. I'd like you to start that today and each day this week and email me at [AprilYvetteThompsonCoaching@gmail.com](mailto:AprilYvetteThompsonCoaching@gmail.com) what you come up with my next Saturday. Tell me what's working, where you need help.

If you can't write the script right now,  
then write about the story you want to write  
because that's writing, too.

And it will get you closer to finishing your story.

**#KeepTheBurnAlive**

[AprilYvetteThompsonsWritersRoom.weebly.com](http://AprilYvetteThompsonsWritersRoom.weebly.com)

## **What if you've never written before and this is all news to you or you're writing a play.**

Let's start with the play template. I LOVE SAM GRABER'S NOTES

### **Field setup**

Do you have MS Word at the ready? What? No? It's too expensive? Didn't you hear? MS Word is now free online. As in FREE. As in it will cost you somewhere between \$0.00 and \$0.00. So get going, already.

- Cover Page. Have one. Title of your play, estimated run time and full contact info here. Because of many ongoing submissions requirements restricting the inclusion of any identifying name within the script pages I suggest the cover page being the only place in your script where your name appears. Sam's Personal Opinion – I don't like this. I feel that as writers we should be attaching our name to our work. Unfortunately, Submitting Playwrights don't make the rules. We play by them.
- Version Marking. I put on the cover page a version marking. I do this so that people don't have to decode date markings from the digital file name. Let's not make it more complicated to determine if we're reading or working from the most recent version.
- Footer. I create a bottom page footer and put the version marking here as well. Again, I feel it's important to have the entirety of the script adorned with the version stamp so that everyone involved knows they are working from the correct script version. You think this is overkill? Another playwright story that did actually involved me getting skewered – I showed up earlier this year in NYC for a rehearsal of a staged reading of one of my plays. Important industry folk were going to attend the reading. Everyone walks into the rehearsal and within minutes we realize that two different versions of the play were in hand. Actors had prepared their roles ahead of time from different script versions. IS THIS FUN OR WHAT?
- Page Number. Goes in the footer.
- Header – Title of play goes here. I use section breaks to differentiate the act marking. My script headers have Title Of Play – Act XXX (One, Two, e.g.). It's the little things.

## TYPE SETUP

- Font. Though I know you want to, let's avoid the wild and crazy history of typesetting. Just use Times New Roman. Size 12.
- Spaces. Proper typesetting dictates ONE space after periods. Unless you are cranking out your opus on a monospaced typewriter do not put two spaces after periods. Ageism does exist in theater (surprise!) and two spaces after periods is a sign that you are not a young person.

## PAGE SETUP

- 8.5" x 11"
- 1" margins on all sides

## STYLES SETUP

Now we get to it. This is the important part. The showstopper. There are four styles you must have for your script.

- CHARACTER. All Caps. Centered on the page. A single space hard return after.
- Dialog. Left justified. Left indent and right indent (I use 0.5"). Space after is more than a single space. Also you must keep lines together. Activate widows/orphans. Do not allow widows/orphans.
- **SCENE HEADING**. I bold and underline. I use all caps with no indent. Left justified.
- Stage Action. This is the one that gets a lot of attention and (believe it!) controversy, which is strange given I'm told all directors and actors ignore these. Thanks for ignoring! We're just the playwrights and we maybe, possibly put these here little stage directions into the script for a reason. I use italic font. I left indent about 3.5". Some people have said they smush the stage action far to the right. Personal preference, of course, but whatever you do I suggest giving sizable paragraph space before and after so that the stage directions are clearly distinguished from the other three styles.

Create these four styles via the styles function in MS Word. Then paste in your raw text . Go through the entire script in MS Word and apply the styles line by line. To cut down on time I special paste my raw text into the Dialog style. This way I'm only applying three styles. It's a given the styles application work is heavily weighted CHARACTER.

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## **Writer Fear and How to Kill It**

Let's meet some first time writers that April's worked with and see how they got to the finish line: getting their plays produced.

**You don't have fear you say?**

**Fear is defined as anything you claim is stopping you from doing the thing you dream of doing: time, money, lack of know-how, etc.**

Hmm, let's look at some examples of what fear looks like.

Writer Fear

### **1. I'm not writing because I don't want to write about my family or tell my business and then they get mad at me.**

You won't know what you have to say until you start writing it. And just because you write a story doesn't mean that's the one you end of telling. Just write and edit the story later. But start. The story you 'think' u want to write that will embarrass your family is probably the story that wants to be told or may just be the jumping off point for a whole new story, but if you let this fear stop you, you'll never write anything.

### **2. I don't want to write about my own life.**

Then write about something else you know. A period in history or an historical event that makes you happy, mad or sad. Write about a memory you wish you had. Ultimately, we write what we know which is our lives, but the writer has the liberty to recast the characters and change the ending. Be free and fearless

### **3. I don't have time.**

How long have you been on Facebook or Twitter today? How long was that really bad movie on Netflix that you sat through last night or in the theatre last weekend or that bad play? Give yourself permission to turn it off or

walk out and go write something down that you do want to see. **If you can't write the story itself, then write about what you want to write about . That's also writing.**

#### **4. I don't know where to start**

How many times have you told your friends about this great idea for a story you have? Each time you tell that story, that's 15 minutes of writing you could have done or recorded you telling your friend the story. Record yourself. That's writing, too.

#### **5. I don't have the money**

How many times did you eat out this week?

How many times have you shopped at Whole paycheck because it's close instead of the much less expensive Trader Joe's

- Turn off your cable and write and read books. That will save you \$150-200/month

- This is how I paid for my writing coach. I turned off my sexy \$150/month cable and just watch Netflix.

The year I did this, I wrote a play and produced, raised \$100K for my play *Good Bread Alley*.

### **Juan Villa on Writer Fear and Finishing the Script**

This is also what playwright/actor Juan Villa did. He saved, talked his ideas to me outline over the course of year and finally took a writer's class/retreat with me and finished his play *Empanada for a Dream*. It was produced Off Broadway in NYC and in Chicago where it was nominated for a Jeff Award for Best Solo Show.



"April's strong, quiet, supportive presence was more vital to me exploring MY story than I would have thought. The safe environment she creates gave me freedom to be fully honest with myself in ways that surprised myself. In any interviews I give nationally about my solo play "*Empanada For A Dream*" (nominated for a Jeff Award for Best Solo Show), I make sure to mention April Yvette Thompson's name because the most complete stories in my award winning play were from her workshops. She has inspired me to help others tell their stories. She taught me that the same commitment I give to others, I should give to myself. I haven't looked back."

### **Juan's Journey in his own words**

5 years ago today I announced that my first play was an official selection for the FIRST Chicago Fringe Festival. I had received an email saying someone dropped out and the first to reply is automatically in the show. I was deathly afraid to say I will do it since I didn't have a script, I just had journal pages. I decided to say I will do it. Surprisingly they said I was the first to reply and I WAS IN!

But I was screwed since I had no director, no designers, no NOTHING. I contacted Joe Minoso and he was all in to direct the show cuz "I have nothing better to do." I contacted Susie Pelayo, who I had met in 2002 for my first Sal Sation Latino Improv/Sketch Comedy Group, to be my stage manager for rehearsals. She jumped at it.

What a crazy couple of weeks leading up to the first performance. We rehearsed for almost 2 two weeks in the Rivendell Theatre Ensemble space, thank you Tara Mallen, in the crazy summer Chicago humidity. I LOVED IT!

I read my first draft of the play sitting on a desk on the roof of Laura Shatkus's building off the Bryn Mawr stop and it last 90 minutes! Crazy how life is so different now.

The original title was Empanada for a Tenement Dream. Yup. It was. I also ended the show with an uplifting poetic story of my search for the perfect empanada the way my mom made it. I also met a newbie from Florida named Sindy Castro.

I had moved back to New York City in 2007 to be with my family. It was difficult leaving Chicago, but it was important for me to be with my family.

I ended up studying with Maggie Flanigan for the Meisner Technique-Maggie Flanigan Studio. I met amazing amazing fellow students who frustrated me like crazy, but were incredibly supportive and inspiring. I also was able to meet mentors like Charlie Sandlan, Alberto Bonilla, April Yvette Thompson, Pandora Scooter, Nate Flower, and Danielle Liccardo-Massood. The studio has grown beautifully. I wouldn't be the artist I am now without that experience. It led to me exploring who I am in a full range of emotions. A byproduct ended up me being a writer.

Who knew that 5 years later Empanada For A Dream would become what it would become, but it wouldn't have happened without Alex Levy.

Who knew that 5 years later I would have a second play getting ready to open up in Don Chipotle by Juan Francisco Villa which wouldn't have happened without Jo Cattell.

Who knew that I would be back in Chicago raising a 5 year old man with a Brit.

I have lost friendships.

I have gained friendships.

People have passed away.

People have been born.

Every day is a new opportunity to make it what you want.

It all started in a moment of fear.

"We need fear to survive. We experience it so we can become stronger."

## **So what do I do now with all of this info?**

Here are the next steps:

1. Well, now, you take the outline template and start stealing 10 minutes every day.
2. Then you download Microsoft word and use the play template by Sam Graber and start plugging in your text when once you've finished the outline and feel ready to write.
3. Over the next week, I will be releasing two more 20 minute video tutorials where I will walk you through the elements of the outline, plot points, character development. So, stay tuned and watch them and send me your questions.
4. Today's recorded class will be loaded onto this page in the next 24 hours, please listen to it again and follow along in the handbook.
5. This is a place to begin. Then you have to find a place, a space to write for longer periods and I have just the place: a writers retreat.



On April, 9-10, 2016 in New York City, I will be hosting a **Finish Your Damn Script Writers Retreat**. This two day, 16 hour class will be available in person or you can dial into the class exactly the way you dialed into today's free class. The class will go on sale in the next week and will have a 15 person maximum capacity. So registration will fill up quickly, but since you signed up for this class, you will get the heads-up first.

### **Bonus for Folks who are on today's call**

Folks who took this class will get to register 24 hours before the class goes on sale to the public and will get a **complimentary 30 private coaching session with April** but only if you buy the class before it opens to the public. This is my annual writers retreat open to the public and won't happen again this year at this price point or for non-clients.

The other special treat is that **you don't have to have a script or any writing experience to take this class.** I will help you develop a story concept from beginning to end. We'll start with the inciting incident and I will walk you through the outline format. By the end of the weekend, you will have your entire script outline done and your first few scenes written, from scratch!

Pretty fricking amazing, but it's totally possible.

**If you already have a script in process or a story idea, that's fine too. You can use the retreat to rework, fine-tune, get some feedback on your structure and most importantly.**

**This is a 16 hour weekend in which all you have to do is write with a guide to help you when you get stuck.**

**The other amazing part of this class is that in order to secure your place in the class today, all you have to come up with is one payment of \$88.**

I know crazy, right!

The class is available in 4 monthly installment payments of \$88.37 or 3 monthly installments of \$117.82.

So, I'll do you one more favor, if you're serious and you want to secure your place in this class before it sells out, you can take a sneak peek at the sales page right now. Click here. [Buy the Writers's Retreat Now](#)

I'll leave this page open for you until midnight tonite. If you want to go ahead and make your downpayment so you don't lose out, then do that now. There are over 100 people registered for this call, so I expect that the class will fill soon as I go public with this sales page, so I'm giving you a heads up.

In the meantime, make sure you listen to the video on this page. And stay tuned for the others coming out on Sunday and Tuesday.

**The Writers Retreat will go on sale this Wednesday evening.**