

What is High Concept?

- ◆ It's different.
- ◆ It's universal.
- ◆ It has instant emotional appeal.
- ◆ You can immediately visualize the story.
- ◆ It can be stated in one sentence.

What a High Concept is Not

- ◆ A high concept is not *Jaws* meets *The African Queen*.
- ◆ A high concept is not like the blurb on the back of a book.
- ◆ A high concept is not simply a TV guide style summary.
- ◆ A high concept is not merely a series of hooks.

Six Elements of High Concept

- ◆ A compelling character with a desperate desire.
- ◆ A flaw related to the character's career or situation.
- ◆ A classic plot device, enticing topic or universal theme.
- ◆ A life-altering inciting incident.
- ◆ An innovative idea.
- ◆ A quirk of fate or irony

Tips on Writing High Concept

- ❖ Read lots of high concept books.
- ❖ Juxtapose genres.
- ❖ Transpose and update settings.
- ❖ Push your idea all the way, transcend the obvious.
- ❖ Write from love and passion.

Finding Your High Concept

- Adaptation—turning real life stories into fiction. Biographies, news events, scientific finds.
- Allusion—modeling your story on biblical, classical, mythological, epic, poetic, musical.
- Altered Universe—locate your story in another time or place outside the current norms.
- Autobiography—write what you know or what you can vividly imagine.

Constructing the High Concept

- Keep it concise. 25 words or less is optimal.
- Ramp up the stakes.
- This is the time for descriptive adjectives.
- Don't name names.
- Use high voltage language.
- Go for emotional punch.
- Remember your target audience.

Examples of High Concept Pitches

A cocky cop must find a way to save people stranded on a city bus that will explode if it slows below 55 mph.—*Speed*

- 1) It's different—exploding bus
- 2) It's universal—almost everyone has taken a bus at one time
- 3) Emotional appeal—life or death stakes
- 4) You can see the entire story—if bus slows down, it goes boom

When a young wife discovers the husband she's convicted of murdering isn't dead, she escapes custody to track him down and kill him.—*Double Jeopardy*

- 1) It's different—double jeopardy
- 2) Universal—betrayal by a spouse
- 3) Emotional—murder
- 4) See entire story—hunts down husband who framed her, she can't be prosecuted for the same crime twice

A young and broke Will Shakespeare falls in love, inspiring him to write "Romeo and Juliet", but ultimately he forsakes his beloved for his muse.—*Shakespeare in Love*

- 1) It's different—the playwright behind the play
- 2) Universal—falling in love
- 3) Emotional—lost love
- 4) Sees entire story—Shakespeare falling in love, but choosing his work over his woman.