



Genre *Conventions*

Genre is not a cage — it is a contract with your audience. Every genre carries a promise about the emotional experience the viewer signed up for. Your job is to honor that contract while bringing something fresh to the form.

Conventions vs. clichés. A convention is a structural element a genre cannot function without. A cliché is a convention executed without originality. Every genre has conventions on four levels — **Setting, Character Types, Story Structure,** and **Emotional Promise.** The best films use these in surprising, resonant ways.

01

Drama

Feel deeply. Recognize yourself.

- **Protagonist:** flawed, emotionally accessible
- **Conflict:** internal or relational, not external
- **Stakes:** a soul, a relationship, an identity
- **Resolution:** honest, not necessarily happy

SEE:

Moonlight, Manchester by the Sea, Marriage Story

02

Comedy

Truth delivered at an angle.

- **Protagonist:** likable, thrust into absurdity
- **Structure:** escalation — each beat bigger
- **Tone:** optimistic core, even in dark material
- **Resolution:** restoration, harmony, wisdom

SEE:

Tootsie, Bridesmaids, The Grand Budapest Hotel

03

Thriller

Terrified of what MIGHT be in the room.

- **Protagonist:** everyman suddenly out of their depth
- **Antagonist:** credible, relentless, resourced
- **Engine:** tension via controlled information
- **Twist:** surprising AND inevitable

SEE:

North by Northwest, Silence of the Lambs, Gone Girl

04

Horror

The safe experience of fear.

- **Threat:** supernatural or physical, real consequences
- **Setting:** isolation — help cannot come
- **Craft:** build dread; earn the reveal
- **Subtext:** the monster is metaphor

SEE:

The Shining, Get Out, Hereditary, A Quiet Place

05

Action / Adventure

Kinetic pleasure of physical mastery.

- **Protagonist:** capable — someone you want to see win
- **Set pieces:** escalating, spectacular sequences
- **Stakes:** global, grounded by the personal
- **Resolution:** cathartic victory — earned

SEE:

Die Hard, Mad Max: Fury Road, Raiders, John Wick

06

Romance

Longing, connection, transformation.

- **Meet cute:** charged first encounter sets the tone
- **Obstacle:** real reason they cannot simply be together
- **Arc:** BOTH characters must grow
- **Dark moment:** makes the union feel earned

SEE:

When Harry Met Sally, Eternal Sunshine, Brokeback Mountain

07

Science Fiction

Ideas that ask, "what does it mean to be human?"

- **Big idea:** a rigorous "what if"
- **World:** internally consistent, quickly established
- **Tech:** a character with moral weight
- **Scope:** cosmic anchored in the intimate

SEE:

Blade Runner, Arrival, Ex Machina, Her

08

Fantasy

Myth. Magic. The heroic quest.

- **Journey:** the monomyth — outer AND inner
- **Magic:** must have rules, limits, cost
- **Mentor:** equips the hero, then must fall away
- **Sacrifice:** victory paid for in something real

SEE:

LOTR, Pan's Labyrinth, Princess Bride, Spirited Away

09

Mystery / Crime

The pleasure of the puzzle. The weight of justice.

- **Central crime:** significant enough to justify the hunt
- **Investigator:** personal reason to pursue the truth
- **Clues:** fair play — no cheating the audience
- **Reveal:** satisfies emotionally AND intellectually

SEE:

Chinatown, Knives Out, Zodiac, L.A. Confidential

WHY THIS MATTERS

When you name your genre, **Script Whisperer calibrates its evaluation lens to match.** A horror script and a rom-com are measured against their own conventions — not one universal standard.

Turn the page →



PART TWO

Blending *Genres* Well

The most beloved and commercially successful films in history are often genre blends. Blending is not diluting one genre with another — it is using two genre languages simultaneously to create a richer experience. It only works when **each genre is fully present in the film's DNA**, not when one is a thin coating on the other.

THE FIVE RULES

- 1 Never abandon either genre.**
Both must deliver from page one to the final frame — not all comedy up front, all drama at the end.
Jojo Rabbit: comedy never disappears even when it devastates.
- 2 One genre drives the structure.**
Even in a perfect blend, one sets the clock. That answer determines pacing, climax, and resolution.
Get Out is structurally a horror film; the social commentary layers within.
- 3 Establish tone early and hold it.**
The first ten pages must signal exactly what this film is. Unearned tonal shifts lose the audience.
The Princess Bride opens telling us it will be both earnest AND playful.
- 4 Both genres serve the theme.**
Blend for thematic reasons, not marketing ones. Audiences can always tell.
Eternal Sunshine: memory erasure IS the film's central question.
- 5 Characters belong to both worlds.**
The genres must be fused into the DNA of the people on screen, not applied as alternating overlays.

PROVEN BLENDS

BLEND	LANDMARK EXAMPLES
Romantic Comedy	<i>When Harry Met Sally, Notting Hill</i>
Horror + Drama	<i>The Babadook, Hereditary, Midsommar</i>
Sci-Fi + Romance	<i>Her, Eternal Sunshine, Arrival</i>
Action + Comedy	<i>Beverly Hills Cop, The Nice Guys</i>
Thriller + Drama	<i>Zodiac, Prisoners, Nightcrawler</i>
Horror + Comedy	<i>Get Out, Shaun of the Dead</i>
Fantasy + Drama	<i>Pan's Labyrinth, Life of Pi</i>
Sci-Fi + Thriller	<i>Ex Machina, Minority Report</i>
Crime + Drama	<i>Chinatown, No Country, Spotlight</i>
Western + Sci-Fi	<i>Westworld, Firefly, Cowboys & Aliens</i>

Ask this of every blend: If you had to shelve this film in ONE section of a video store, which section? That is your dominant genre. Everything else is a secondary layer.

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

- ⚠ **Tonal whiplash without preparation** — sudden shifts you haven't earned destroy audience trust.
- ⚠ **Ignoring conventions entirely** — know the rules before you bend them.
- ⚠ **One genre overwhelms after the midpoint** — blends must be sustained to the final frame.
- ⚠ **Comedy as garnish only** — if it's just a pressure valve, it's not a blend.
- ⚠ **Blending for market appeal, not theme** — audiences can always tell.
- ⚠ **Confusing convention with cliché** — one is structure, the other is lazy execution.

Using this with Script Whisperer

Name your genre when you submit. For blends, name **both**: "This is a Horror/Comedy in the tradition of *Get Out* and *Shaun of the Dead*." That single line tells Script Whisperer how to calibrate tone, structure, and the emotional promise your script is making.

/evaluate

Scoring lens adjusts to your genre. A horror film and a rom-com are measured against their own standards.

/develop

Structural questions target your genre — arc shape, obstacle type, the resolution audiences need.

/feedback

Scene work is genre-informed — what a scene must accomplish and the tone appropriate to the moment.