

**Story Consultant SAMPLE - by Suzanne E. Gillis**

SCREENPLAY TITLE: '**SOAPLAND**' (screenwriter not mentioned)

GENRE: Romantic Comedy

**OVERALL IMPRESSION:** First of all, this is not a comedy, nor a romantic comedy. It is more a drama with comedic moments. In addition, the story lacks an original or compelling story line. There needs to be a lot more development in terms of subject matter, character development, plot and conflict.

**SCREENPLAY TITLE:** Doesn't convey what the story is about or that it is a romantic comedy. I would try to find a better title. It also makes an American audience think of soap opera or soap because they would not be familiar with a place in Japan that is 'called' SOAPLAND. So the title doesn't do much to help the screenplay or set the tone of this story or its genre.

**LOGLINE/PITCH:** *"An aspiring writer and ladies man travels overseas to improve his sex life."*

The point of a pitch/logline is to convey character and conflict. There is nothing redeeming about a man who travels abroad to improve his sex life. Also, the way you have written this script, it doesn't come off as a farce in terms of a script like AMERICAN PIE or NATIONAL LAMPOON or other such scripts that are so comedic in nature that they could possibly get away with such a weak premise. The only reason they do, is because they fill the script with constant gags which makes the script an outright farce. And this is not what you have here. You are trying to create a romantic comedy, which means we have to believe these characters actually exist, and then find touching moments between them, mixed in with misunderstandings and comedic moments. This so far, is not at all what you have and therefore, the genre you have chosen is off for this story.

**OVERALL STORY/PREMISE:** Unfortunately, as the script stands now, the overall premise is not strong enough to base an entire script on. It does not present a clear enough challenge for the main character to overcome. Also, there is no clear antagonist, which leaves the main character appearing self-indulgent and unchallenged throughout. Even the American woman he falls in love with in Japan doesn't challenge him enough or to force him to see his weaknesses which we need to address in the second and third act. Charlton needs more external conflict and not internalized conflict to carry the weight of this story and to get the audience to care about him. Internal conflict does not make for a good comedy subject matter. It is used almost exclusively in dramas, not comedies and doesn't add enough meat to base this current script on.

**ORIGINALITY:** Poor. Unfortunately the overall story lacks an actual 'hook'. This means, there is no real story. In addition, the conflict for Charlton to overcome is

extremely weak and there is not one person or obstacle that is stopping him from his 'weak' objective which is to find sex abroad.. What is at stake for him? What is his goal? If it's to be a writer, how is sleeping with women achieving this? And who or what is preventing him from reaching his goal? Remember, the goal needs to be present in the logline. We need to know exactly what challenge the main character is going to have to overcome. This is called the hook of the story and needs to be present in the logline. Right now, there is no clear conflict or hook for him to overcome. The story needs much more conflict, twists and turns and far more character development. The love story isn't compelling enough to drive this script home and doesn't even surface until the third act. This is not the structure of a romantic comedy. The premise also doesn't present enough humor to play out as a romantic comedy. If this was written as a drama it would play much better than it does now as a romantic comedy. The story needs far more compelling and humorous premise/plot line.

STORY PLOTS & TWISTS: Since there is no clear conflict to the main characters' objective, there is no way to add plot points or twists, which are designed to get in the way of his achieving his ultimate goal in the story. This leads again, to a very weak story, which leads to coherent plot lines or plot twists. Therefore, the story doesn't propel the reader on. Also the set-up is weak. There is not enough at stake for the central main character to follow up on. Therefore, the story drags on in act two and three, with no real conflict being added to move the story on. Everything Charlton wants he gets and far too easily. In addition the story lacks a specific genre. Currently it is not a romantic comedy and does not follow that genre's format. It currently reads more like a coming of age story, but even that is lacking the appropriate tone. It is my feeling that the writer still does not know yet which genre will best suit his particular story yet and still needs to think about this. Once he decides, he needs to follow the specific structure of these genres to ensure that his story works fundamentally reaches its intended target audience.

OVERALL STRUCTURE: This is also underdeveloped. Not enough at stake for the main character to keep this story alive. See movies like 'LOVE ACTUALLY' for how a casual 'sex romp' premise is more of a secondary character storyline in a typical broad/romantic comedy. The concept of going abroad for sex does not provide enough of a challenge to our central character to make for a compelling story. There is not enough at stake for Charlton if he fails and not enough clear justification for him to have to go Japan to simply find women to sleep with. We need to know where the humor of this story lies in order for us to want to participate in the comic relief of this sex romp before we can justify wanting to see the central character succeed. Also, the conflict should clearly present some situations in which we will see Charlton squirm when he is presented with trouble in achieving his goal. Currently, there is no antagonist to drive this story and no real conflict. As a result the overall story remains weak and the structure suffers because of this. Also scene transitions are poor. This is a direct result of the writer having no real place to because of the lack of conflict. Transitions are the trademark of a pro screenwriter. We need to know exactly where the writer is taking us with the story and why, especially in a comedy script. Too many scenes and tag lines are repeated throughout with no real results. If there were more at stake for Charlton, these problems

could be resolved. Once the conflict/premise is made clearly enough, the writer will have more choices of locations to keep this story afloat and hopefully the opportunities to add more humor overall. Also, please see examples of screenplay writing samples. For example, SOUNDS and CHARACTERS NAMES are all always capitalized. See SYD FIELD'S book on SCREENWRITING. This covers all these areas of screenwriting and is the first book all professionally trained screenwriters are required to read once they start studying the skills of professional screenwriting.

MAIN CHARACTERS: Presently, every character remains one-dimensional and is not clearly defined, including the main character Charlton. This is essential to making memorable and likeable characters and to making a successful romantic comedy. The female lead character is also weak. She comes far too late in the story and is also not clearly defined. Romantic comedies need to multi-dimensional characters in order for us to sympathize with their goals. We need to know more background on them, who they are, where they came from, and what is stopped them from achieving their ultimate goals. This is the premise is created, to bring these two individuals together. They need to carry equal weight in the story to be a romantic comedy. Right now, you only have Charlton's story moving this script alone, which is still too weak. Also, the conflict isn't directly tied into a humorous premise. A man who's just looking to have sex doesn't make for a good romantic comedy premise. There is no external conflict at work here preventing him from reaching this goal or challenging him to grow up and change his selfish attitude. Remember, all characters need to work on two levels: internally and externally. In comedies this external conflict is the meat of your humor and story. We still don't know what makes Charlton special or why we should care about him. We still need to know his history, where he came from, what his financial and educational background is, and what strengths or weaknesses are. Once we know this information, you can present situations for him to overcome that would then become the actual 'hook' of your story. We need to know WHY we should be rooting for him!

SECONDARY CHARACTERS: The one secondary character you created, does not show up until your main character is in Japan. Even then, he is just a stranger, and does not act as a real friend or in a way that demonstrates that he is actually a secondary character at all. This script currently is in desperate need of a secondary character to force the main to talk about and address his real inner problems so we can get at the meat or purpose of this actual story. The secondary character also serves as a comic relief in most romantic comedies as well as other comedic scripts. Typically, we need to fall in love with the secondary characters and be able to sympathize with their problems as well. Both of Charlton's male buddies are exactly the same (American and Japanese) and don't stand out. These secondary characters still need considerable work.

DIALOGUE: Poor, only because its purpose is to convey character and conflict, and right now this story is still lacking both. The phrase "hooking up" becomes too redundant. It only serves to lessen the strength of the overall storyline by making the main character unlikable, shallow and self-serving. The stakes are not high enough to make the humor or dialogue stand out. The premise of him being a writer and getting to number ten sex romp just isn't a compelling enough journey to provide enough gags and

scenes to keep this story alive. This is apparent in the dialogue. Once the premise is fixed, the dialogue should become more humorous as it convey the character's weaknesses and ultimate goals. Currently there is little to draw upon in terms of character background to add enough humor in this story and make the dialogue stand out.

CINEMATIC QUALITY: Fair to poor. Currently, I can't see why going to Japan is necessary to this story. Nothing happens there that can't be addressed in the USA. This is a huge expense and there is no clear justification for it at this point.

CONCLUSION/SUGGESTIONS: Needs much more work in most fundamental areas. But first, you need to find a much stronger overall story premise that presents a 'real' challenge for the main character to overcome. The central plot needs a clear goal and conflict as well as more developed central characters in order to work. In addition going to Japan should add some humor to this story, otherwise, if the object is to just sleep with ten women, why would Charlton need to travel half way around the world when there are plenty of women right here in the US. Once in Japan Charlton finds a Japanese 'friend' who ends up not even really becoming his friend or buddy. In addition, his character is almost identical to his Charlton's which makes him not even different enough to offset the humor of the story or add anything new in terms of conflict, humor or added dimension to the already weak story. Even his name is American, Bob, and not Japanese. So what is the purpose of his having an American name if he's not American? There is no explanation for this and again, it doesn't make any sense to the story or to his character. Charlton also ends up falling in love with an American woman in the end. Again, we don't understand the purpose of his travelled all the way to Japan to sleeping with ten Japanese women in Soapland, which is a place where you pay for sex, then once he gets there he doesn't sleep with any of these woman and ends up hooking up with another American. Meanwhile, Bob has no real agenda in helping Charlton either achieve his goal of getting to number ten in Soapland. This is not what a friend does in a comedy screenplay. He either prevents the main character from achieving his goal or helps him, but often ends up making more conflict in the story in terms of plot points, humor and conflict.

Overall, at this point, I would study more romantic comedies and watch more closely how the main character interacts with the secondary 'friend' character in all of these romantic comedies. Then go back to your script, and try to add more of these moments to the story. As for Plot issues, see other movies where there is a time clock ticking which always is a great writing tool in comedy. Also think of stories where the character has only six month's to live or is getting married in a week, which might add to a more compelling reason why Charlton feels he needs to 'reach number ten' by a certain date and why he's so determined to do this, perhaps out of fear of facing responsibility. In the end, right now we do not care enough about Charlton or his 'hooking up' or not at this point. His values seem too shallow for us to relate to. His life is simple and self serving. This makes for a very 'unlikeable' leading man or main character. We need to sympathize with his goal, and want to see him achieve his dream.

More importantly, what is the value of this goal and why should we want to see Charlton

find love at this point: As of now, Japan does not present itself as a means in helping Charlton overcome his problem, and in fact only serves as a temporary distraction to the main problem and his reasons for needing to sleep with ten women. And what does a goal say to an audience about what kind of a man Charlton is? I would suggest reading **THE SCREENPLAY WORKBOOK** by Jeremy Robinson before attempting to work on a second draft. This book clearly outlines what is needed in writing a successful screenplay. Also, flashbacks and voice over are frowned upon unless they are done in an exciting new way or used by an experienced writer. Also, look at other comedies and find out if what you're really wanting to write is in fact a comedy. If you want any more help in brainstorm or possible suggestions for improvements for this script, please call me. Good luck with the next draft.