

11

THE **FUNDAMENTAL**
QUESTIONS

A Guide to a Better Story by **Aaron Mendelsohn**

THE BEST TIME TO ASK (AND RE-ASK) THE 11 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS IS WHEN YOU'RE...



Considering a script or book idea

Breaking a story

Creating a pitch

Outlining your project

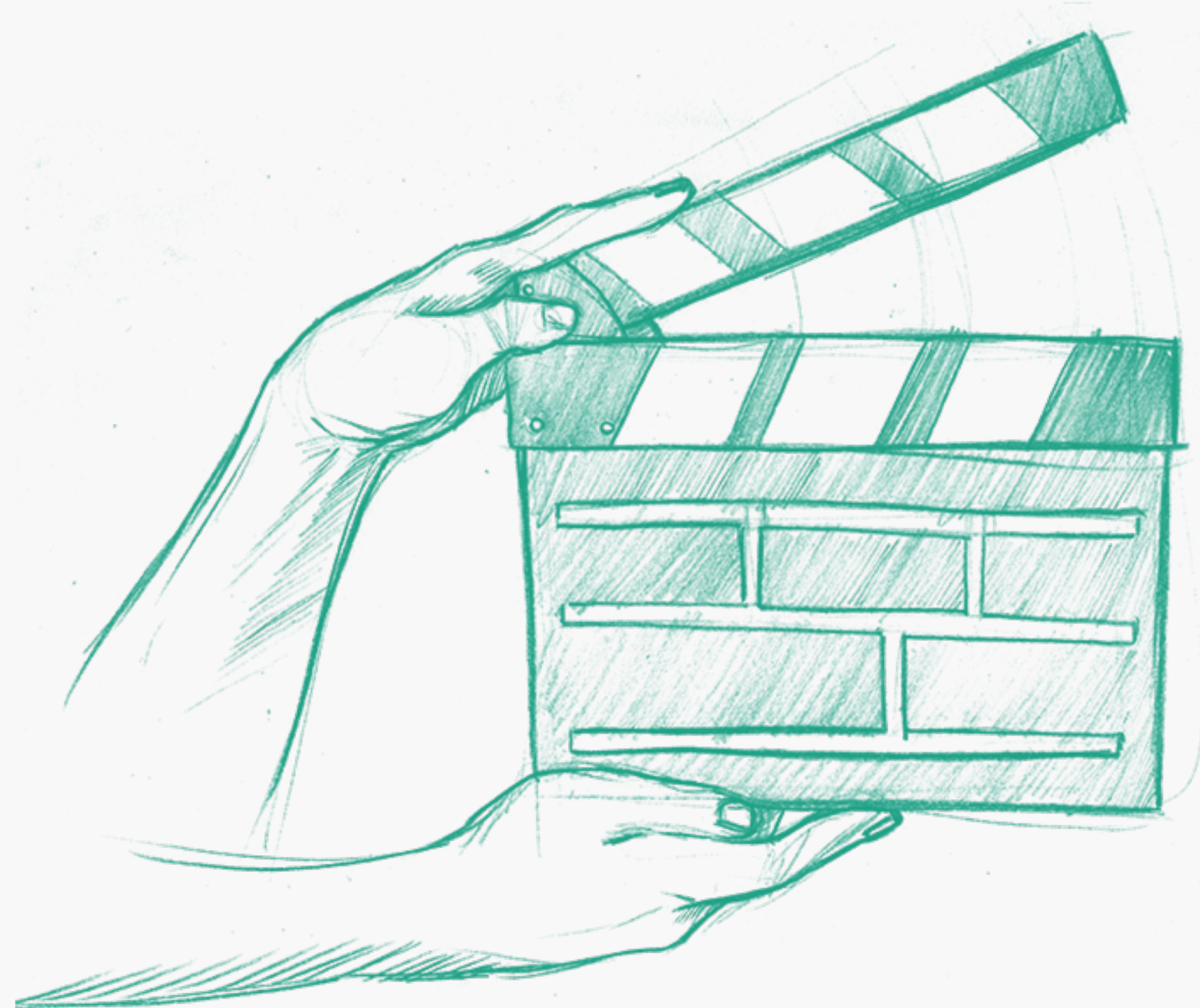
Writing your project and hitting a wall

Starting a rewrite

About to begin production

THE 11 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

WORK FOR...



Books

Film

Pilots and television series

Short Stories

Short films and videos

Web series

Plays

True stories and biographies

Comics and graphic novels

Any kind of story

THE 11 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

TEST THE **STRENGTH** OF YOUR **STORYTELLING**

The key is to **accept the answers** and **incorporate them into your story** even if it means **changing your outline, book or script**.





01

DO YOU KNOW **WHAT**
YOUR STORY IS
ABOUT?

SUM UP YOUR STORY IN A SIMPLE, CONCISE SENTENCE (ALSO KNOWN AS A **LOGLINE**).

If you are unable to do this, or you wind up with a run-on sentence, **your story may be overly complicated.**

NAME THE FILM:

“An arrogant king who suffers from a debilitating stutter is forced to work with an eccentric speech therapist to deliver the speech that will save his kingdom.”



Examples:

THE GODFATHER

An epic tale of a 1940s New York Mafia family and their struggle to protect their empire as the leadership shifts from the father to the son he'd hoped would go straight.

BREAKING BAD

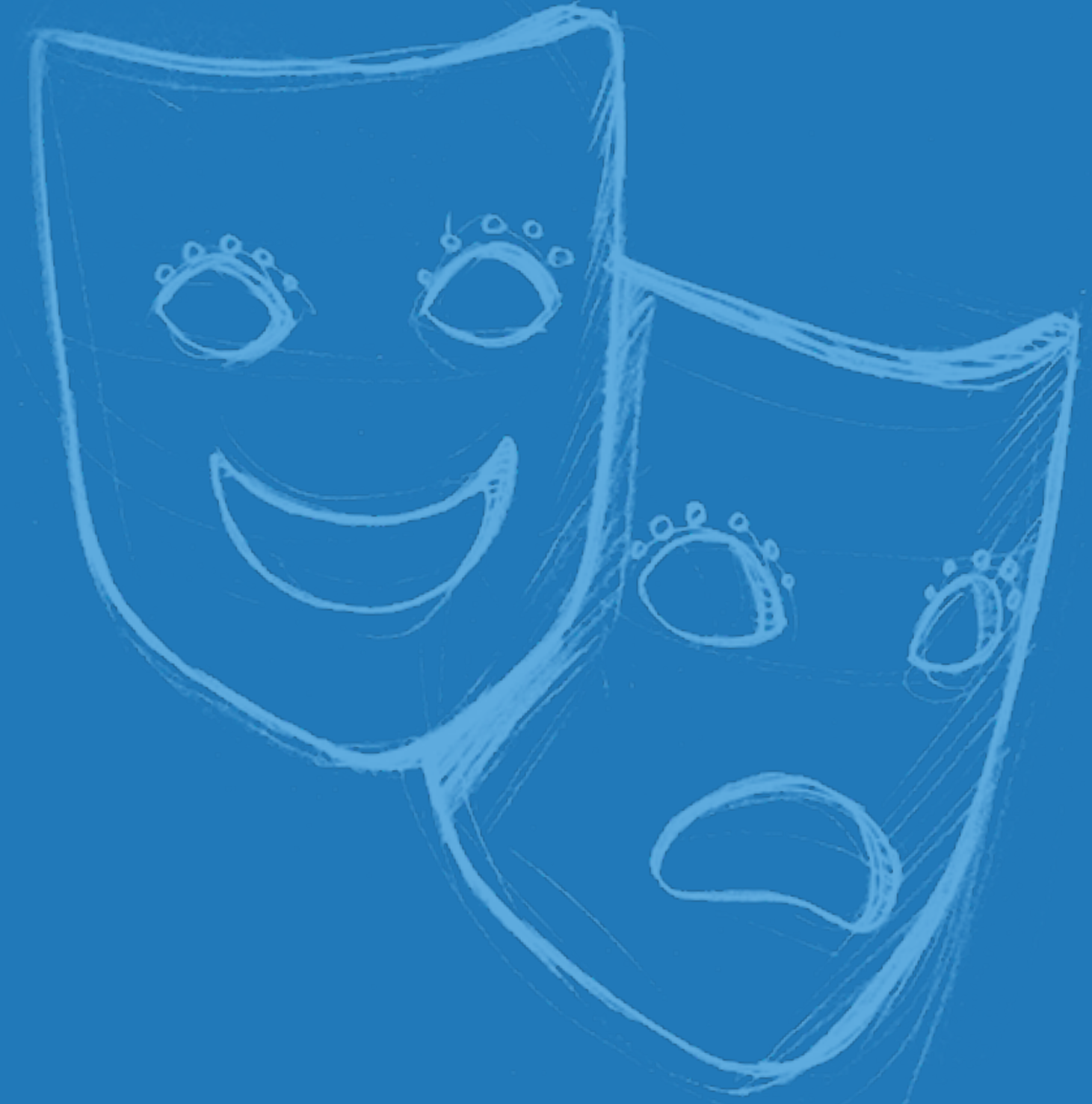
A mild-mannered chemistry teacher, after learning he has terminal cancer, teams up with a sketchy meth-head to make and sell high grade methamphetamine in order to provide for his family after he's gone.

GROUNDHOG DAY

While visiting the town of Punxsutawney, PA, an egotistical TV personality must relive the same day over and over again until he can learn to be more selfless.

THE WALKING DEAD

After the zombie apocalypse, an intrepid band of men and women cling to their humanity as they fight to survive zombie attacks and worse – the evil that men do.



02

HOW ARE YOU
HONORING OR SUBVERTING
YOUR **GENRE?**

YOUR AUDIENCE HAS CERTAIN EXPECTATIONS

WHEN IT COMES TO GENRES LIKE COMEDY, HORROR, SCIENCE FICTION, ROMANTIC COMEDY ETC.

Consider **incorporating some of the best tropes** of the genre into your story while **adding fresh new twists** that upend expectations.

How do these films and TV shows honor and/or subvert their genres?

Alien, Deadpool, the Sopranos, Cabin in the Woods, Dexter.



03

WHAT
IS THE **CENTRAL**
IDEA?



Not to be confused with the logline, the **Central Idea** is the **OVERARCHING NOTION OR THEME THAT DRIVES THE STORY FORWARD AND IS TESTED IN EVERY SCENE.**



WHEN HARRY MET SALLY

Can men and women be friends without sex getting in the way?



MAD MEN

Don Draper's worst enemy is himself and the shameful past he's trying to escape.

Film Examples:

THE MATRIX

Neo can only be the One when he believes he's the One.

THE AVENGERS

The superheroes can only save the world once they come together as a team.

GRAVITY

If Ryan finds the will to live, she will get back home.

THE KING'S SPEECH

King George can only be a great leader if he allows himself to be vulnerable to the people who can help him.

TV Examples:

THE SOPRANOS

Tony must always choose between what's best for his business and his family.

MODERN FAMILY

Three families face wildly different challenges but persevere because of what they have in common: love.

HOMELAND

That which makes Carrie the most effective agent in the CIA – her mental instability – also makes her the most dangerous.