

WRITING SAMPLE

TOP STORY

An Original Screenplay

by

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Descriptions starting with --- are there for you in this Writing Sample, they are not in the actual script.

--- WNCN was a highly successful small television and news station that offered high-quality journalism, founded by Whitehead's father, and now is in serious financial situation, almost bankrupt. Whitehead hired Ben Shepard, a Corporate Doctor, to bring him back from disaster, save jobs, and the station. Little does Whitehead know Ben Shepard is a bloodthirsty, money-hungry but well-connected psychopath.

INT. WHITEHEAD'S OFFICE, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

--- Doug Barnes, a Pulitzer Prize Winning Journalist, is still pacing, rubbing his neck and growling. Doug signed onto WNCN years back to do high-quality, socially motivated programming to help others. He's a journalist's journalist, a street-raised hot-head with a huge heart. He and Whitehead are dear friends. They're in an emergency meeting with the management.

WHITEHEAD

I hate this, just like you do, Doug,  
I got an A in literature from  
Princeton...

DOUG

Your father was a major benefactor  
probably was an F minus.

WHITEHEAD

(pops a TUMS)

True. But our jobs are on the line  
and I have no choice. Barnes? Please  
stop pacing and sit down we have an  
emergency.

DOUG

Everything on the news is an emergency -  
I'm a journalist.

WHITEHEAD

A "Pulitzer-Prize-Winning Journalist."

DOUG

And you want us to get cheaper than  
cheap disaster? How "Twenty First  
Century" of you.

WHITEHEAD

I appreciate the support.

DOUG

I was hired to write journalism.

(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)

This decision you're making is going to destroy this station's mission.

WHITEHEAD

What am I supposed to do? We're a small network, dealing with these badass corporate mergers and the Internet. Should I close my doors because we're bleeding money?

Doug paces and growls.

WHITEHEAD (CONT'D)

If it weren't for Ben and Red Hawk here, you'd be writing cook books like everyone else.

DOUG

Tellin' the truth isn't easy, Thurston! You can justify this ridiculous business decision any way you want. But the truth is what this station used to be about, what you used to be about...

BEN

(stepping in)

...I don't mean to interrupt your little love quarrel but may I say somethin'...

DOUG

...NO...You belong in another corporation doing things like putting carcinogens in children's cereal to create longer shelf-life - or better yet, create toxic waste that's destroying the atmosphere and pay-off some coward Lobbyist and some moron Senator who is willing to lie, cheat and steal for your payoff...

BEN

...Thank you, I appreciate the compliments, but even so, we've got to face the fact, Dougy...

DOUG

...Doug...No EEEEE.

BEN

Doug-no-EEEE...we're still in the red - not one hit on the air, every

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

new show's gone under - even the news for Chrissakes.

DOUG

You're blaming stories about the most important issues of our time on the decline of WNCN?

BEN

You know how you destroy ratings?

DOUG

By hiring business men with their heads up their ass, their hearts in the toilet, and their brains upside down?

BEN

No Dougy-boy. No one wants to hear talk-shows on Freud, or how poverty-drenched kids feels about their prostitute, drug addict homeless mothers dying on the street from Aids. They want blood. Disaster. They want to be terrified. It's Television not Church.

General, uneasy laughter. The two men stare one another down.

WHITEHEAD

I'm sorry, Doug, I love your writing, you're a man of the people. But for a while they'll be no more of the your stories I love so much! I'm sorry. Really. I need your help. So does Ben. We all do. Just until we're in the black again.

Mr. Whitehead's secretary BARB (a Doris Day look alike), runs in frantic.

BARB

Mr. Whitehead, I'm sorry to barge in like this but there's been another bombing.

Horror fills the room. Whitehead is stunned. He looks up bewildered.

WHITEHEAD

Again? Where?

BARB

San Francisco. The Pier, sir. The Children's Museum. All those children!

WHITEHEAD

...My God...

The room is loud with shock. Everyone is talking to everyone else.

WHITEHEAD (CONT'D)

(flustered)

I...I want everything we have on this. I'm beginning to hate this business...Ben, take over...My stomach.

(rising to exit)

Excuse me, I'll be right back.

Whitehead exits holding his stomach. The room quiets.

BEN

As much as I hate to admit it, this just might be the lifesaver we need. Frank?

FRANK

(waking up blurts out)

WE'LL GET IT DONE!

BEN

Oh good something new.

Doug stands in shock pulls out his phone and dials.

BEN (CONT'D)

OK listen carefully I want you to dig up old Archives. Clips. Bomb sites. Films. TV shows. God knows there's got to be a million shots of mindless disasters. I need interiors. Exteriors. Close ups of agony, pain and suffering. Lotta suffering, blood and death!

(yells to everyone)

Everyone listen up - here is the new slant on this disaster:

Ben raises his arms up as if looking at a great painting he's describing. Everyone stops and watches. Doug's face is cringing.

BEN (CONT'D)

"What happens when it really happens."

FRANK

Yo!

BEN

Is that English, boy?

FRANK

American.

BEN

We've come a long way! You and Tom make a fifteen second clip that'll scare the daylights offa General Patton's Panties. We'll air it with the live coverage.

FRANK

Yo!

Frank exits followed by his team.

DOUG

I see Emmy's lining our shelves. Greatest piece of shit television in the history of human-kind.

BEN

Dougy boy...

DOUG

...Benny Poo?

BEN

Oooooo I love it when you talk dirty. I want you to work on the Denver bombing - the aftermath: Interviews with families, survivors, policeman, clergy, I don't care what. Get ANY story that has to do with disasters like this.

DOUG

(rising, beyond disgusted)  
At least I gave up my vacation to do something meaningful.

BEN

What are you all waiting for?

Half the staff leaves. Whitehead enters, weak and still sick.

---LATER---

---Everyone is being watched via invisible, futuristic high-tech surveillance technologies. No one is safe if they are on to Ben Shepard's killing spree. Shepard, using Deep Fake Technology frames Dawn for being the mastermind behind the San Francisco Children's Museum Bombing, and a shopping mall earlier this year killing hundreds. Dawn, her husband Lou and Mary (Doug Barne's wife) are on the run and onto Shepard. Suddeny Mary and Lou are found murdered in a motel - sending Dawn on the run alone through the wilderness as every cop in America is searching for her. Ben wants to keep her on the run, not dead - to continue the drama, the story, and reap huge profits via inflated advertising prices world-wide, keeping the world audience on their feet, and having first coverage of the events that he is creating!

Whitehead grows suspicious of Shepard, and confronts him, who reveals he's the mass murderer who helped Whitehead out of losing his father's studio, and made him billionaire.

INT. WHITEHEAD'S OFFICE - DAY

Whitehead and Ben are there watching the huge 20 foot TV. On it, the Wyoming Motel Room Murder Scene is on. There is a swarm of police cars. Two bodies are being brought out in body bags. FAME STEELE, an All-American ex-football player, blonde, perfect features and a WNCN TV NEWSCASTER in Wyoming speaks to a camera.

FAME STEELE

The scene in this out of the way  
Wyoming Motel was bloody.

Photo of Dawn splashes across the screen - a mean shot.  
CAPTION: MAD DOC ON THE RUN - WHO WILL SHE KILL NEXT?!

FAME STEELE (CONT'D)

Madwoman Dr. Dawn Matthews, a  
confessed co-conspirator in the San  
Francisco Bombings is suspected to  
be the murderer in this location too -  
the victims - her celebrated husband  
Detective Lou Matthews, and an  
unidentified woman. "The Mad Doc"  
has escaped authorities. Fame Steele  
for WNCN News, in Wyoming.

COMMERCIAL: BREATH MINT POPPED INTO A MONTH. A WINKING EYE.

Whitehead snaps off the sound with a remote on his desk.

WHITEHEAD

(devastated)

This whole thing is making me feel completely disgusted.

BEN

Ratings are soaring, money is just pourin' in like Niagra, sir. That's what you wanted.

WHITEHEAD

How did we know these killings were going on in WYOMING for Chrissakes?!

BEN

I have sources, sir.

WHITEHEAD

What sources? I have no affiliates there - where did the lead come from they were on the run across multiple states? In a motel off the road in the middle of nowhere?

Whitehead looks at his father's portrait.

BEN

I have sources, sir.

WHITEHEAD

Yes, I know you keep saying that. I never understood the capture of those two boys either - so quickly, hours after the bombing? And that trial ran so effortlessly it could have been scripted.

BEN

It was. I have a team of people that help me know things very quickly. It's best that you do not know my sources for your own protection.

WHITEHEAD

Who the hell has sources that can read minds for chrissakes?! This Dr. Dawn Matthews, I researched her extensively. She has an impeccable record. Done more good in the past five years alone than most do in fifty. Helps kids in prison including getting them off drugs, and the elderly, and others - how could she be a terrorist - it's absurd.

(MORE)



WHITEHEAD (CONT'D)

This woman could write books, have her own television and radio shows if she wanted.

Ben snaps on the sound on the large TV.

MARY'S FACE comes on the huge TV with a bullet through her head.

WHITEHEAD IS STUNNED.

WHITEHEAD (CONT'D)

(slowly rises to his feet)

Oh my God. MARY! Oh Dear God in Heaven. Wha...how the hell...How can this be? That's Mary Barnes, Doug's wife. What was she doing in...

BEN

...I remember her, I met her at one of your parties. Very nice woman.

WHITEHEAD

This is Mass Murder we are talking about! Over four hundred people in two bombings. Do you understand what we're doing at this station?

BEN

Killin' people to make money.

Whitehead's face dies - they stare at one another. Ben has a little sick smirk on his face.

BEN (CONT'D)

Have you ever looked out your window? Read a history book? The Criminal King is not new. Mass murder, just another form of winning. As in any "War"... winning is all that matters!

WHITEHEAD

(terrified)

I've heard enough.

BEN

(growing hateful rage)

You were sittin' in your own shit and now 'cause you got a bank account again you decide it's time to have a conscience? Standing on your moral pedestal. You're a trust-funder - an idiot with a paper crown, can't wipe your own ass without a maid.

WHITEHEAD

(enraged)

YOU'RE FIRED! GET OUT!

Ben smacks him across the face and laughs. Then blocks the door, and face to face walks Whitehead back into the room. Whitehead takes shelter behind his desk against the huge cityscape behind him. They're standing on either side of Whitehead's desk and Ben grabs Whitehead by his tie bringing his face into his directly over the large desk. Whitehead hits Ben across the head with a paperweight which falls to the floor sending Ben flying back, holding his head but it doesn't knock him out. Blood runs down the side of his Ben's face. Whitehead's weak, feeling very sick, and moves to exit but Ben blocks his way. Ben is smiling like a ravenous wolf about to attack his prey. They both stand off in the center of the large office. Outside is the panoramic view of skyscrapers, and in the office on the huge TV screen is WNCN News coverage continuing to splash clips of the disaster from the first story of the mass murder of 100's of Children at the Children's Museum to the present motel murders of Lou (Dawn's husband) and Mary Barnes who were onto him - in rapid-fire succession of violent images from their news casts. Ben and White head stand still in the center of the office.

WHITEHEAD (CONT'D)

(trembling with fear)

You...you Killed Doug, and...Mary, and Lou Matthews, didn't you? And all those priceless children! And framed those people somehow!

BEN

(too calm and smiling)

No sir. You're the one who killed them.

WHITEHEAD

I'VE NEVER HURT ANYONE IN MY ENTIRE LIFE! I NEVER WOULD WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!!!

BEN

You hired "me".

Silence. Whitehead's face dies in terror, and disbelief.

BEN (CONT'D)

Your innocent act is breathtaking. The incompetent child of a wealthy piece of shit who made his fortune in the great American Myth off someone else's blood, sweat an' tears. You're a class of immaculate mass murderers. Hiding behind champagne.

WHITEHEAD

(trembling)

That's not true.

BEN

Yes it is. Too hard to face the truth about your own ilk and how they obtained all their wealth. You don't see the massacres of a hundred and twenty million American Indians, or the rape of black slaves by Presidents! Wars created for money, the Industrial Revolution abusing workers ripping flesh off their fingers - the list is endless you son of a bitch. Your kind created this paradigm we all live under. We killed only four hundred give or take! You've killed hundreds of millions! You just refuse to see the blood on your hands.

WHITEHEAD

YOU'RE DELUSIONAL! GET OUT I WANT TO HEAR NO MORE!

BEN

(pointing out the window)

Right outside you're million dollar windows, competitors are trying to kill your business for their profits right this very minute. Eat you alive. And I warn you, Mr. Criminal King, there are things that we've done to make you rich, if exposed, would destroy you and your priceless family's legacy, and put your sorry-ass in prison. Maybe the Gas chamber.

Whitehead dodges for the door but Ben blocks his way and standing him off, picks up the large paperweight Whitehead hit him with and tosses it up and down, catching it with a sinister psychopath's blood lust.

BEN (CONT'D)

(breathing heavily)

We were gutter poor, and he wanted me to survive. So, you know what my daddy did to teach me the way of world for poor southern boys who had little chance to advance under the thumb of men like you?

THE CAMERA BEGINS TO CIRCLE AROUND THEM

As it circles it grows in speed, as if they were in a rodeo, the swirling huge room, the skyscrapers outside, the news in

rapid-fire succession coming into frame behind them on the huge TV screen as the camera swings by, faster and faster.

BEN (CONT'D)

He put me in a room with my doggy. Nice big black Labrador named BUTCH. Drooled a lot. Hungry mongrel. Hadn't fed it in five days and so Butch was getting real mean an' ornery. Daddy gave me a hammer. Said, "son, it's you or him. If he lives, you die - 'cause Butch wants to eat you. So I took that hammer and...well...here I am, sir. Here the fuck I am.

---LATER---

--- Dawn hid in the deep woods of Wyoming from the massive man-hunt for her, and finally found her way to NYC from Wyoming, on foot and stealing cars using her late husband's high-tech equipment. She has effortlessly broken into WNCN Studios in NYC using the futuristic equipment. Now, she is hiding with her machine gun, ready to take the studio in the morning. She is extremely dirty, and looks like a homeless person.

---In the morning Ben Shepard arrives in his stretch limo, escorted like a king to the 50th floor. Dawn holds him at gunpoint, pushes him through the doors with her foot, and shoots into the ceiling. WE SEE the media station swing into action from the control booth, to the studio, creating on-the-fly graphics using AI technology of THE MAD DOC holding Ben Shepard at gunpoint and who wants to make a statement to the world. Dawn tries to make the audience "feel" rather than just "see" what's happening on the screen.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Everyone is completely still, watching her. WE SEE this as Frank switches from one angle to another, capturing her many emotions converging at once, while she tries to focus. Then, suddenly, Dawn quiets down, an uneasy calm surfaces. Dawn looks right at us and speaks intelligently. WE SEE HER CLOSE UP ON OUR TV NOW. Just her speaking to us.

INT. VENT - CONTINUOUS

No shot, a camera hanging from the ceiling is in the way. Bullseye curses under his breath.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

DAWN  
 (to the camera)  
 Touch me. Go on. Can you?

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - CONTINUOUS

A small child kneeling in front of the TV has his hand on the screen trying to touch Dawn. The light illuminates his face and body.

MOTHER  
 Alex get away from there you're  
 blocking my view. Alex!

The child smiles looking at Dawn's face, his small hand touching her face. His face and Dawn's are right next to one another.

INT. MAIN TV STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Dawn fires a shot into the ceiling. Everyone screams. Then silence.

DAWN  
 Did you feel the vibrations? Or  
 just the sound on your TV? If the  
 bullets went into a person on your  
 TV, would you hear their bones  
 cracking, feel his or her body  
 trembling in fear, feel their  
 agonizing pain, smell the blood?  
 Did you feel the agony in my heart  
 for my losses?

INT. RED HAWK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Red Hawk looks troubled. Dawn is reaching his heart.

DAWN (ON REDHAWKS TV)  
 What did my baby FEEL when tons of  
 cement crushed her delicate little  
 body? What did all those priceless  
 children feel? What did it sound  
 like? It was on the news! All you  
 did was see it from a distance,  
 through a "screen". An image of  
 reality. DID YOU KNOW HER EYES WERE  
 BURNT OUT OF HER HEAD?!!!  
 (she almost loses it)

Red Hawk, Ben's side-kick Harvard Graduate genius accountant and money manager, but unaware of Ben's guilt, is in his

office, watching on his TV, wincing as if feeling Dawn's pain. His eyes are tearing up.

DAWN (ON REDHAWKS TV) (CONT'D)

Do any of you really care? Answer me! Oh, you can't do that either? My suffering is reality. Can you feel it? No, you can't do that either. What is separating us from one another's reality? Your TV screen? Phone screens? Computer screens? What are we becoming to one another?

Red Hawk is devastated, and falls back into a large stuffed chair, watching.

INT. WNCN MAIN TV STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

DAWN

That's how we communicate now instead of looking into one another's eyes. Reality is up for grabs. Or for sale! The price are human lives.

She pulls out a small manilla envelope and places it on the chair with her small TV.

DAWN (CONT'D)

I demand an investigation into these crimes, and I have sent to Lt. Sanders and others my Husband knew and worked with.

INT. MAKESHIFT OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Lt. Sander's eyebrows raise high.

MONTAGE:

AROUND THE WORLD SHOTS: People are mesmerized, their eyes glued to their TV's, as they watch intently. No one is convinced that she's innocent; they're confused.

INT. MAIN TV STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Dawn slowly places her gun on the chair with her small TV, steps back from it, takes a second photo out of her pocket. Now there is one of Victoria in one hand, one of Lou in her other hand. She holds them up high over her head, arms rigid forming a "Y" in surrender. The photos are in clear view on the huge TV behind her. Everyone is frozen with fear.

INT. SWAT HEADQUARTERS AT WNCN - CONTINUOUS

Lt. Sanders, watching this unfold on his Laptop in the makeshift headquarters, he speaks into his walkie-talkie.

LT. SANDERS  
I WANT HER ALIVE! Repeat... ALIVE.  
You're on national television - no  
mistakes! No heroics! Move in.

INT. MAIN TV STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

THROUGH THE CONTROL ROOM WINDOWS

WE SEE the police squad break in from all doors surrounding the sound-stage, the remote cameras moving to capture every shot. Five swat-team cops standing like statues form a semi-circle around her, their automatic rifles aimed directly at Dawn's head. Other police help Ben to standing moving him out of the way to safety. Dawn stands perfectly still, her eyes closed in deep agony, her hands high up in the air holding Victoria and Lou's photos facing us, one in each hand for all to see.

INT. CONTROL BOOTH - SAME MOMENT

Everyone is looking at Dawn and the scene as if at the zoo viewing a horrible beast.

FRANK  
(to Pam through mic)  
Annnnnnd...Go!

Pam's face fills the screen.

PAM POWERS (ON TV)  
(very excited, fast)  
An unbelievable drama has unfolded  
right here in our television studios  
putting a terrifying end to the San  
Francisco bombings and the insane  
rampage of ruthless FUGITIVE AND MASS  
MURDERER - THE MAD DOC - DAWN MATTHEWS.

HOLD ON DAWN IN THE STUDIO AND THE FIVE SWAT TEAM OFFICERS HOLDING HER AT GUNPOINT.

MARY BETH (V.O.)  
RUN ALL THOSE ADS NOW!

BEHIND DAWN ON THE HUGE TV A COMMERCIAL BEGINS:

FIRE IN A FIREPLACE BACKDROP.

Nat king cole's "chestnuts roasting on an open fire" plays as a hot blond model enters into frame wearing a sexy nightgown, models it. Other models enter modeling other sexy clothing as nat sings.

Lt. Sander's enters fast. He has a bad limp. He cuffs and frisks Dawn and grabs the envelope Dawn placed earlier on the chair.

LT. SANDERS

Dawn, I have your files. And I'll take these, too. I knew your husband. I don't know what happened here, but I sure as hell want to find out.

(to his Police Team)

Let's get her outta here there's a circus outside. Protect her.

Lt. Sanders takes Dawn's arm walking her out along side her and surrounded by the police. He reads her the Mirada Rights.

EXT. WNCN - 5 MINUTES LATER

News Reporters are held back by policemen. We are almost blinded by their flashing cameras. Dawn exists with her escorts. A camera crew from WNCN is right on top of her following her and the police where many other TV and newspaper reporters are waiting. Dawn and Lt. Sanders get into a black Police Van as Camera's click ravenously.

INT. MAIN TV STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Ben is being helped by two policemen to standing. He is pretending to be traumatized. Pam Powers is at her desk.

ON THE LARGE WALL-SIZE TV

THE NAT KING COLE "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire" COMMERCIAL ends - one model throwing us a kiss, waving.

INT. WHITEHEAD'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The staff is relived but still in shock. Red Hawk is looking out the large windows at the City Scape, one hand on the glass leaning on, it as if to hold him up, deeply distraught.

ON HIS LARGE TV:

PAM POWERS (TO CAMERA)

Mr. Ben Shepard, an executive at the station, and Dawn's hostage today, would like to make a statement.



INT. MAIN TV STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

ON THE HUGE TV IN THE STUDIO is Dawn's freeze-frame Capture Image with the five swat guns pointed at her head, her hands up high over her with a photo of Vicky in one hand and Lou in the other. Ben steps into the center of the studio with Dawn's Capture Image frozen behind him.

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO US, AS IF WE WERE WATCHING HIM ON OUR TV.

BEN

I'm still shaking. Please give me a moment, thank you.

Ben takes a moment, breathes in, and looks at us with deep empathy on his face. He wipes a tear in the silence. All in the studio watch in awe.

BEN (CONT'D)

I want you all to know personally, how deeply my heart goes out to the many families who lost their loved ones, in these horrible tragedies. It is for this reason, that this station exists. We seek the truth. The whole truth. And nothing but the truth. That's our job. It's a tough job. Especially with events like these. And we want you all to remember that we at WNCN care about you and your loved ones - like our own - that's why our dedicated staff and crew reports the news. To bring us all a little closer together. To shed the light of truth onto all men and women. To keep us safer. And to help create a future of goodness, harmony and love for all the blessed children and peoples of the world. On behalf of WNCN TV and our late Mr. Thurston Whitehead, my colleague, my mentor, and my dear, dear friend, and for Doug Barnes, the greatest journalist who has ever lived, and that I've ever had the good fortune to befriend - I thank you for your support. May God bless each, and every one of you.  
(empathetic smile)

FREEZE FRAME

HOLD ON BEN'S FACE with a gentle, reassuring smile, full of empathy.

Frozen behind him on the wall-size TV, is Dawn's capture image: Rifles pointed at her head, her eyes closed in terror, as she holds Victoria and Lou's photos in both hands, high above her in the air.

THIS FROZEN IMAGE REMAINS AS CREDITS ROLL OVER IT.

The End