



SHOW NOTES

Ozark pt. 2: What's Wrong with Exposition?

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If you watch Episodes 1 through 7 of Ozark, Season 1, you will see some of the finest TV writing anywhere. But Episode 8 is a flashback episode that just doesn't feel like Ozark.

Rather than unfolding in real time, and under the pressure of time, we flashback to a time when that ticking clock did not exist.

This flashback episode doesn't work because it grows out of a completely different engine, one built around exposition rather than threat.

Putting your focus on that expository information is almost always a mistake.

The audience doesn't come to a movie or a TV show for exposition. They come for drama.

Ozark, fortunately, waited until Episode 8 to make the mistake of confusing structure with exposition. So we're still coming back for Episode 9, despite this bump in the road. Because we know how good this series can be.

Unfortunately, many new writers will make this mistake at a much more dangerous time, in their pilot.

If you use your pilot to "set up" the future, "establish" the backstory, or "explain" how your characters got here, nobody's ever going to watch Episode 2.

Your job as a writer is very simple. Don't save the best for last. Save the best for first.

Rather than starting with the "why" or the backstory, start right in the middle of the action that most writers might save for a later episode

After you write your pilot, write episode 2. And about half the time, what you will learn is that episode 2 is actually the pilot and the pilot is actually the boring backstory.

Rather than thinking about all the many things it would be nice for the audience to know, instead ask yourself, is there any one thing they really need to know.

And then, rather than wasting a pilot, or in Ozark's case, an episode, on backstory and exposition, you can get creative about how to sneak that one idea in, that one moment in, right in the middle of the drama.

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