



Dear Janet McGinn ,

Thank you again for sharing your time and talent with us in this year's Script Competitions!

We provide complimentary reader comments to all entrants who opt in. Please bear in mind that these comments are subjective. These comments do not reflect the opinion of Austin Film Festival, its staff, or sponsors; they are the opinion of one of the readers assigned to your material.

This feedback is intended to help in your writing process and to reinforce our mission of championing writers.

**Script Title:** MOST WANTED DAD

**Category:** Drama Feature

**ID:** 8860

**Plot:**

While the concept was strong, the plot felt a bit unclear. The incorporation of flashbacks while necessary in some respects, at times distracted the reader from the momentum of the story. Although the narrative was driven by the desire to find out what happens to Roy and whether his appeal is granted, various elements were underdeveloped. Thematically, religion was a big part of the story and of Roy's life, however, beyond his scant sermons and occasional declaration of a proverb, the reader struggled to grasp a sense of why Roy's faith was so strong, and how that could have contributed to his perspective on incarceration and his own morality. Moreover, the plot seemed to lose a bit of momentum as the story progressed. Perhaps if there was a dramatic question that needed answering, the flashbacks would be of

better use in uncovering a "piece of the puzzle" rather than illustrating a straightforward account of Roy's legal troubles.

### **Concept:**

As a reader, it was interesting to see the true story of a man on his quest to free himself from a wrongful conviction due to prosecutorial negligence. This story incorporated identity in a unique way that is seldom done, and it provided a unique perspective into the criminal justice system and the appeals process.

### **Overall:**

The concept is a strong one with a nuance that provides a great twist in perspective. However, if the writer were to focus on a time frame that encompasses most of the action and limit the amount of flashbacks, that would be of great benefit to the plot. Moreover, a greater development of characters and subplots (ie Jeanette and Roy's relationship, Troy's cheating, Roy and Wanda's marriage) would benefit the dramatic tension and strengthen the character arcs. Removing dialogue that is obvious or does little to further the plot is recommended. Framing the plot and flashbacks by incorporating a dramatic question (ie a whodunnit) would benefit the direction of the story and maintain the momentum between scenes. Exploring themes such as religion, father-daughter relationships, poverty with greater detail would also strengthen the story. The reader encourages the writer employ phrases that are from the Navajo culture, and not solely English adages translated. Proofreading for grammar and spelling mistakes would also benefit the script and limit the potential distraction.

### **Dialogue:**

The reader commends the writer for taking on the challenge to depict a legal drama. And for the most part, the writer did a great job at encapsulating legal jargon. However, the dialogue between the characters felt underdeveloped and lacking depth. There were moments where the setting provided time and opportunity for discussion between Roy and his daughter that would have illustrated a

better picture of their dynamic. Awkward lines such as Roy attempting to seduce Chenoa on his first phone call with her, or "I think my husband will never cheat like my Dad" (pg 32) or "He's the reason we're broke." (pg 34) don't feel natural, and/or are showing, rather than telling.

### **Structure:**

Although the story benefitted in large part to the prevalence of flashbacks, the sheer number of them became distracting. It became difficult to glean what part of the story the reader was being shown, and took away the opportunity of uncovering information through dialogue in the present day, rather than flashbacks. Some elements that could be simply explained were instead presented as a flashback, and this often interrupted the flow of the story. Perhaps if there were a smaller number of timeframes to reference, the story would feel a bit more compact. Just as well, the final act of the story felt underwhelming. David dies, and Jeanette decides to excommunicate herself from her father, but it all happens in rapid succession, which makes it difficult to mourn the losses for Roy.

### **Characters:**

The reader would have liked to have seen more of a character arc for the Roy and Jeanette. Their relationship is definitely illustrated, but not fully explored. There was obvious resentment present in Jeanette's life - - but there was little to see from her that would have illustrated that more. Moreover, the arc of Roy and his daughter's relationship seemed shallow. Whether they had gotten closer or drifted apart in the span of their relationship (the latter being the case in this story) it was not illustrated in a substantial way. Jeanette states to her husband that she is afraid of who her father has become, but there was no tension between the two to punctuate that perspective. Just as well, Roy's character felt one-dimensional. He talks of the Bible, but does not mention his personal relationship with religion and how it shaped him and his decision-making. Throughout the story, multiple characters are introduced, but the audience doesn't have a sense of an antagonist. Whether it is a person or the "system", the story needed an element

that has the potential to "break" Roy. And because that was not present, the dramatic stakes were effectively lowered.

Please keep in mind that the reader comments included as part of the competition entry are intended to summarize the reader's evaluation and should not be considered coverage notes. Austin Film Festival's coverage program is a separate, more extensive service.

This is an industry that demands persistence, and one opinion cannot define your talent as a writer. If writing is your passion, please continue to pursue it; we hope to be a resource for you again in the future through our various programs and events.

If you are interested in receiving more in-depth notes on your script, we would like to offer you a \$10 discount for our Coverage Program. If you submit to our Coverage Program, a separate reader will provide a full evaluation of your script.

For more information and to submit your request online, [CLICK HERE](#). When you fill out the online form, use the discount code: AFFCOV10

The 2025 Script Competition will open for submissions on December 9, 2024. We hope you consider sharing your work with us again. Please visit [www.austinfilmfestival.com](http://www.austinfilmfestival.com) for more information.

Best of luck with your writing and please stay in touch!

Sincerely,

Grace Donaldson  
Script Director