

## **Nuremberg (2025) – A Screenwriter’s Breakdown for Educators**

**Nuremberg** offers a masterclass in historical screenwriting that prioritizes ethical tension over spectacle. By framing the trials as a legal and psychological experiment, the screenplay demonstrates how ideas, language, and institutional uncertainty can drive compelling drama.

For writers, it’s an essential study in adapting real events without flattening complexity -- and in transforming intellectual stakes into cinematic momentum.

### **Tone Breakdown**

#### **Primary Tone: Grave Moral Drama**

The screenplay carries the weight of history without tipping into sanctimony. Every scene is burdened by consequence -- legal, ethical, and human.

#### **Secondary Tone: Intellectual Suspense**

This is a thriller where the weapons are language, precedent, and logic. Courtrooms replace battlefields; arguments replace gunfire.

#### **Tertiary Tone: Quiet Psychological Unease**

Through Douglas Kelley and Hermann Göring, the film explores the unnerving banality and charisma of evil -- not as monstrosity, but as cognition.

#### **Undercurrent: Moral Precariousness**

The Allies are not portrayed as morally omniscient. The script repeatedly asks whether justice created retroactively can still be justice.

#### **In short:**

Grave, cerebral, restrained, and morally complex, with sustained intellectual tension.

## **Key Themes for Screenwriters and Educators:**

### **1. History as Drama, Not Pageant**

The script avoids reenactment stiffness by grounding events in human decision-making.

#### **Screenwriting Takeaway:**

- Focus on moments of choice, not historical inevitability.
- Let history emerge from conflict.

### **2. Intellectual Stakes Can Be Cinematic**

The question “Should we try them?” is treated with the urgency of a ticking bomb.

#### **Screenwriting Takeaway:**

- Ideas become action when consequences are clear.
- Debate is drama when power is at risk.

### **3. Humanizing Without Absolving**

Göring is charming, intelligent, manipulative -- and unmistakably dangerous.

#### **Screenwriting Takeaway:**

- Complexity is not sympathy.
- Write villains who can think.

### **4. Institutions as Characters**

The legal system itself becomes a protagonist -- incomplete, evolving, and vulnerable.

#### **Screenwriting Takeaway:**

- Systems can carry arc.
- Process can generate suspense.

## **5. Parallel Perspectives Enrich Theme**

Jackson's legal struggle and Kelley's psychological inquiry reflect different paths toward understanding evil.

### **Screenwriting Takeaway:**

- Dual protagonists can explore the same theme from opposing disciplines.

### **Discussion Topics:**

- Can justice exist without precedent?
- Depiction vs interrogation of historical evil
- The ethics of retroactive law
- Psychology vs accountability
- Charisma and moral danger
- Writing dialogue-driven suspense
- Responsibility of historical dramatization

## Critical Lens: What This Screenplay Gets Right — and Where It Falls Short

### What This Screenplay Gets Right

#### Moral clarity without moral simplicity

- The screenplay never questions the guilt of the accused, but rigorously interrogates the process of justice itself -- a crucial and mature distinction.

#### Intellectual conflict as dramatic engine

- Legal debate, ethical uncertainty, and jurisdictional risk generate real suspense without relying on spectacle or manufactured urgency.

#### Humanizing evil without absolution

- Göring is depicted as intelligent, charismatic, and manipulative -- making him more dangerous, not more sympathetic.

#### Institutional storytelling done right

- The legal framework itself evolves onscreen, allowing the audience to experience history as something being invented, not inherited.

#### Controlled, disciplined tone

- The screenplay resists melodrama, trusting language, performance, and restraint to carry emotional weight.

## **Where It Falls Short**

### Density may limit accessibility

- The intellectual rigor that gives the script its strength may challenge less historically or legally literate viewers.

### Emotional distance from victims

- The focus on perpetrators, prosecutors, and process necessarily sidelines the lived experiences of victims, which may feel austere to some audiences.

### High reliance on dialogue

- While expertly written, the screenplay offers limited visual or kinetic variation, placing heavy demands on performance and direction.

### Risk of perceived inevitability

- Because the historical outcome is known, some dramatic tension relies entirely on execution rather than surprise.

## **Why This Matters for Students & Emerging Writers:**

**Nuremberg** is an exemplary teaching script because it demonstrates how intellectual ambition and moral seriousness can coexist with cinematic discipline. Its limitations are not failures, but trade-offs -- revealing how every narrative choice prioritizes some values at the expense of others.

### **This screenplay encourages discussion about:**

- When density becomes exclusion
- How restraint shapes tone
- The ethics of centering process over suffering
- How history can be dramatized without distortion

It's a reminder that strong screenwriting is often about choosing what not to show.

### **Suggested Exercise:**

Rewrite a single scene from the perspective of:

- 1) a camp survivor testifying, or
- 2) a junior court clerk witnessing the proceedings

Then compare how tone, empathy, and narrative focus shift -- and what is gained or lost by that reframing.

## Legacy:

**Nuremberg** positions itself alongside *Judgment at Nuremberg*, *The People vs. O.J. Simpson*, and *Munich* -- works that interrogate justice rather than celebrate it. What distinguishes this screenplay is its focus on process over verdict and systems over heroes.

Rather than framing the trials as moral victory, the script treats them as a necessary gamble -- an attempt to build a legal future from moral ruin. It's a screenplay deeply concerned with how societies define evil after surviving it.

For students, **Nuremberg** is a rare example of ideas functioning as narrative engines, proving that intellectual rigor can sustain cinematic tension.

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