

Peter Hujar's Day (2025) – Screenwriter’s Breakdown for Educators

Screenplay By: Ira Sachs

ADAPTED FROM Linda Rosenkrantz’s book *Peter Hujar’s Day*

Draft: April 7, 2024; 55 pages.

Biographical drama / slice-of-life chamber piece / docudrama (verbatim adaptation)

LESSON PLAN

MENTOR: Nick Runyard | 8FLiX Institute (for Emerging Screenwriters)

PROFICIENCY: NOVICE | **ADVANCED BEGINNER** | COMPETENT | PROFICIENT | EXPERT

REQUIRED READING: Peter Hujar's Day (2025) Screenplay (8FLiX.com [free account required for downloads]).

OPTIONAL VIEWING: Peter Hujar's Day (2025) (Janus Films)

Logline

In December 1974 New York, photographer Peter Hujar narrates the previous day to writer Linda Rosenkrantz, and a “nothing day” becomes a revealing self-portrait of an artist hustling for work, attention, and meaning.

Synopsis

Writer Linda Rosenkrantz records Peter Hujar as he recounts, minute by minute, what he did “yesterday” as part of her fascination with how people actually fill their days.

What comes out is part diary, part stand-up confession: errands, calls, visitors, darkroom work, name-drops, insecurities, and the constant low-grade pressure of making art in a city where time costs money (and nobody has any). Peter even catches himself in small self-mythmaking, then admits the lie and interrogates what it “reveals.”

The day winds down into street-noise and observation, ending on a quiet, unsettling image of looking out the window at night, then a slow fade to black and the river beyond.

Tone Breakdown

Primary Tone: Intimate Verbatim Confessional

A tape-recorder chamber piece where the *telling* is the drama.

Secondary Tone: Wry Downtown Art-Scene Deadpan

Banter, name-drops, food, bands, absurdities, all delivered with a calm face and sharp edges.

Also: *"It's like a whole novel already."*

Tertiary Tone: Artist Hustle Anxiety (Soft-Panic Realism)

Money owed, invoices, credits, trying to be "a businessman," the constant buzzing calculation under the anecdotes.

Undercurrent: City Nocturne, Quiet Loneliness, Human Static

Window air, cigarettes, overheard street life, then that final observational drift into night and river.

In short:

Tender, funny, restless, nocturnal, a cassette click in a warm room while NYC mutters outside.

Screenwriting Takeaways

- **Make the frame do the heavy lifting**

One room, one conversation, endless story pressure. (Chamber pieces live or die on intention.)

- **Mundane events can still arc**

The day reads “small,” yet accumulates into a portrait of need, ambition, and vulnerability.

- **Use process as action**

Darkroom work, phone calls, visitors, logistics. Craft becomes kinetic.

- **Let the city enter as subtext**

Noise, interruptions, commerce, hunger, exhaustion.

- **Dialogue can be musical without being “writerly”**

The rhythms feel lived-in, not polished for applause.

- **Meta-structure is your secret weapon**

Linda’s stated goal (“*how people fill up their days*”) is the story’s thesis.

- **End on an image that reframes the talk**

The window-watch + river fade is a quiet thematic mic drop.

Critical Lens: What Works vs Where It Falters

What Works

Radical specificity

- Small details build a lived world and a lived mind.

Truth is messy

- The lie-and-correction pattern captures how identity is performed in real time.

Minimalism with purpose

- The frame forces focus on voice, subtext, and rhythm.

Where it Falters (or challenges students)

Plot expectations get punished

- Students trained on conventional arcs may mistake “quiet” for “empty.”

Access and context

- References and social circles may feel opaque without cultural scaffolding.

Ethics of “verbatim” storytelling

- What changes when real speech becomes performance? Who benefits from the framing?

Classroom angle

Use the script to separate two skills students often blur:

- **Event-writing** (what happens) vs. **meaning-writing** (what it reveals).

What This Screenplay Teaches

This script is a lesson in turning pure voice into propulsion. The “plot” is memory, the stakes are identity, and the structure is a deceptively simple engine: *tell me what you did*, and let the telling expose the person doing the telling.

Why This Screenplay Matters for Students & Emerging Writers

This is a masterclass in **voice-driven storytelling** where structure is built from:

1. a framing device (the tape recorder),
2. a single objective (tell me your day), and
3. the revelation that “nothing happened” is usually a lie we tell ourselves.

When Peter worries the tape might be boring, Linda’s response is the teaching thesis: it’s not boring. And as Peter starts recounting, Linda clocks the real surprise: *“it’s like a whole novel already.”*

Big ideas and themes

- Self-mythology vs. self-knowledge

Peter notices his own “slight altering” of events, then interrogates what it reveals.

- The artist’s economy

Creative life as invoices, favors, credits, and the anxiety of getting paid.

- Attention as currency

Name-dropping, social navigation, and the desire to be seen (professionally and personally).

- Process as action

Darkroom work, calls, interruptions, small tasks that add up to a day with shape.

- City as subtext

Noise, intrusion, overheard lives, and the intimacy of apartment walls.

Anchor moments

1) The assignment, the frame, the voice

Peter opens by admitting he forgot and didn't write anything down, immediately setting up memory as both unreliable and revealing.

LESSON: How an opening confession establishes tone, stakes, and character.

2) "The lie" as character reveal

Peter flags a lie, offers the "other version," and names what matters: the lie "did reveal something."

LESSON: Subtext and status. Why people lie in social ecosystems, even to friends.

3) The thesis and the "whole novel" moment

Linda explains the project: finding out how people "fill up their days."

Later, as Peter realizes how much he actually did, Linda nails the form: *"it's like a whole novel already."*

LESSON: Meta-awareness on the page that still feels organic.

Discussion Topics

- Where do you see Peter performing a version of himself? Find 3 moments and name what he's trying to accomplish socially.
- Why does a "slight altering" matter? What does the lie reveal about insecurity, status, or belonging?
- Linda claims she feels she "doesn't do anything much all day." Is the script arguing against that feeling, or validating it?
- What counts as "action" in a screenplay like this? Make a list: task-action, social-action, emotional-action, artistic-action.
- Why is the ending image so effective? What does it add that dialogue can't?

Writing Exercises (high impact):

Exercise 1: “A Day, Told Out Loud” (15–25 minutes)

- Write a 2–3 page scene where Character A recounts yesterday to Character B.

Rules:

- One room.
- One object that “records” or anchors the scene (phone, notebook, recorder).
- Include one admitted lie and one correction.

Exercise 2: The “Nothing Happened” Trap (10–15 minutes)

- Write a monologue that begins: **“I didn’t do anything today.”**
Then prove it wrong through specifics until it becomes a miniature character study.

Exercise 3: Sound as Story (10–15 minutes)

- Write a page where an external sound (construction, street noise, music) interrupts the speaker and changes the emotional temperature.

In-class activity (easy to run, great results)

“Transcript to Cinema” Lab (30–45 minutes)

1. Assign students a short portion of a real conversation (or a provided transcript).
2. In groups, convert it into a screenplay page **without making it “more dramatic.”**
3. Compare versions: where did the drama come from (selection, rhythm, interruption, framing, subtext)?

Teaching point: Drama is often a product of **curation**, not invention.

Assessment options (quick grading rubrics)

- **Voice Accuracy:** Does the scene feel like a person speaking, not a writer showing off?
- **Revelation:** Does the “day” expose character (values, anxieties, desires)?
- **Structure:** Even with minimal plot, does it build (shift, deepen, turn)?
- **Economy:** Does the writing trust detail instead of explanation?

Mentor Nick says:

Peter Hugar’s Day proves a sneaky truth: if you write a day honestly enough, it stops being a day. It becomes a mirror. And if you let the mirror talk back, it becomes story.

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8FLiX Institute

545 King St., West

Toronto, ON., Canada M5V 1M1

+1 (647) 317-9057

nick@8flix.com



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