

# Behind the Lines

*Every screenwriter dreams of writing a line of dialogue that achieves TV or movie immortality. But it takes more than good writing; it also takes good direction, great acting—and more than a little good luck. Here are the stories behind some of film and TV's most enduring quotes.*

**Famous Line:** “Fasten your seat belts, it’s going to be a bumpy night.”

**Said By:** Margo Channing (Bette Davis) in *All About Eve* (1950)

**Story:** This oft-imitated phrase—usually ending with “ride” instead of “night”—was coined by Oscar-winning screenwriter Joseph L. Mankiewicz in this movie about an aging actress who takes a young starlet under her wing, only to be betrayed by her. (Interestingly, the metaphor is referring to passenger air travel, as most cars didn’t have seat belts in 1950.) According to film historian Sam Staggs in the book *Vanity Fair's Tales of Hollywood*, it was Davis’s improvisational delivery that elevated the line to iconic status:

It is in the party scene, Margo takes her cue from Karen, who says, “We know you, we’ve seen you like this before. Is it over—or is it just the beginning?” Instead of responding immediately as indicated in the script, Margo drains her martini and walks toward the stairs with a shoulder-rolling, hip-swinging swagger. She halts, swerves, regards Karen, Lloyd, and Bill with a scowl, then lets it rip: “Fasten your seat belts, it’s going to be a bumpy night.”

Mankiewicz came up with the line, but the timing was all Davis’s. “Those are things that you should be able to do as an actress that a director wouldn’t think of telling you to do,” she said. “When Margo holds back like that, it lets you know that she’s collecting venom.”

**Famous Line:** “Show me the money!”

**Said By:** Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding Jr.) in *Jerry Maguire* (1996)

**Story:** Cameron Crowe admitted that while writing the sports agent drama, he was “swinging for the fences” by trying to write a classic movie line. But he also warns screenwriters that this approach rarely works: “Audiences are smart. They smell the typewriter; they feel the studio executives’ hands reaching into their pockets. More often than not, they reject the spoon-fed big line with glee.” Proving his own point, Crowe actually thought that another of Tidwell’s lines—his fake form of currency called “the Kwan”—would resonate with audiences. But it was

“show me the money” that really caught on. (Even presidents have used it.)

Crowe got the line while researching for the movie. He followed around an NFL player named Tim McDonald, who was going through difficult contract negotiations at the time. “He was at an owners’ meeting to be paraded through the lobby to get his price up, because he was a free agent,” recalled Crowe. “McDonald said, ‘I’ve got a wife and I’ve got kids, and I’ve been beaten up for five years here in Phoenix, and now I’m a free agent. Show me the money.’” Crowe said he “turned McDonald’s yearning for financial self-worth into Tidwell’s war cry.” (Gooding later said that the line has “haunted him” ever since. “I can be at a funeral, and in the back you’ll hear some jerk go, ‘Show me the money.’”)

**Bonus:** Crowe actually wrangled two classic lines from that movie. The other one: Renée Zellweger’s “You had me at hello.”

**Famous Line:** “There’s no crying in baseball!”

**Said By:** Jimmy Dugan (Tom Hanks) in *A League of Their Own* (1992)

**Story:** Screenwriting partners Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel (who also wrote *City Slickers* and *Parenthood*) say they come up with their best lines while conversing as the characters they’re writing—and that’s how this line was born. It comes in a scene in which washed-up player Dugan is managing an all-women’s baseball team during World War II—he berates a player in the dugout, and she starts tearing up. “Are you crying?” he asks. She says “no” between sobs, to which Dugan whines, “There’s no crying in baseball!” (He then repeats it several times.) Ganz and Mandel knew it was a funny line, but they didn’t expect it to become a famous line...until they heard Hanks’s delivery.

**Famous Line:** “I drink your milkshake! I drink it up!”

**Said By:** Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis) in *There Will Be Blood* (2007)

**Story:** In the final scene of writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson’s drama, oilman Plainview drunkenly explains to a preacher, Eli Sunday (Paul Dano), how he had stolen his oil reserves and defeated him: “Here, if you have a milkshake, and I have a milkshake, and I have a straw. There it is, that’s the straw, you see? Now my straw reaches across the room, and starts to drink your milkshake. I drink your milkshake! I drink it up!”

Anderson didn’t come up with the milkshake metaphor himself, though. He took it from the testimony of Albert Fall, a New Mexico senator who appeared before Congress in 1924 during the Teapot Dome scandal. “He was asked to describe drainage,” said Anderson. “And his

way of describing it was, ‘If you have a milkshake and I have a milkshake, and my straw reaches across the room...’ I’m sure I embellished it and made it more Plainview. But Fall used the word *milkshake*, and I thought it was so great. I get so happy every time I hear that word.”

But wait: a 2013 article in the *Case Western Reserve Law Review* reported that there was no such quote from the Teapot Dome scandal hearings. The article suggests that Anderson’s inspiration was much more recent: while debating drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in 2003, Senator Pete Domenici (coincidentally, also of New Mexico) said,

The oil is underground, and it is going to be drilled and come up. Here is a giant reservoir underground. Just like a curved straw, you put it underground and maneuver it, and the “milkshake” is way over there, and your little child wants the milkshake, and they sit over here in their bedroom where they are feeling ill, and they just gobble it up from way down in the kitchen, where you don’t even have to move the Mix Master that made the ice cream for them.

(Wherever Anderson got the line, it makes us want a milkshake.)

**Famous Line:** “I am the one who knocks!”

**Said By:** Walter White (Bryan Cranston) in *Breaking Bad* (2011)

**Story:** This chilling line was written by Gennifer Hutchison, who started out as *Breaking Bad* creator Vince Gilligan’s assistant on *The X Files*. She has since emerged as one of television’s most lauded scripters, thanks in no small part to the “one who knocks” speech. It came in a pivotal episode of the AMC show’s fourth season when Walter’s transformation from cancer-stricken chemistry teacher to murderous meth manufacturer becomes known to his wife Skyler (Anna Gunn). “It’s the first time Walt really owns up to it,” explains Cranston, “not only to himself but also to his wife.” Skyler tells Walter that she’s afraid someone will come knocking on their door and shoot him. “No,” he responds coldly, “you clearly don’t know who you’re talking to, so let me clue you in. I am not *in* danger, Skyler. I *am* the danger. A guy opens his door and gets shot and you think that of me? No. *I am the one who knocks!*”

Hutchison is proud of that speech: “It was always a cool scene, but I didn’t realize how big it would become.” Not only was it voted *Breaking Bad*’s best line by its fans, but like any iconic quote, it has become the subject of numerous parodies. (Don’t believe it? Go online and check out all of the *Breaking Bad* “I am the one who knock-knocks” jokes.)

**Famous Line:** “I’ll be back.”

**Said By:** The Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in *The Terminator* (1984) and nearly every movie Arnie’s made since

**Cheerleading was primarily a man’s sport until WWI, when college-age men went off to war.**

**Story:** Writer-director James Cameron didn't expect this to become the most famous line from the film. In the original script, the Terminator enters the lobby of a police station and queries about the location of Sarah Connor (whom he's hunting), only to be told he can't see her. He then scans the lobby and says to the clerk, "I'll come back." But when it came time to film the scene, Schwarzenegger thought it felt a little flat—that it would be more comedic if he says "I'll be back" instead. Cameron was reluctant, initially telling his star, "I don't tell you how to act; don't tell me how to write." But then he eased up and gave Schwarzenegger 10 takes to say the line. Then came another problem: Schwarzenegger's thick Austrian accent made it difficult for him to say "I'll" clearly (it sounded like "owl"), so he suggested, "I will be back." Cameron didn't like that either, but let Schwarzenegger try it. When it came time to edit the film, Cameron chose the take in which the Terminator says "I'll be back."

The first time Cameron saw the film with an audience, he didn't expect the line to get a reaction because the joke, as he wrote it, isn't complete until a few moments later when the Terminator drives a police van through the lobby. But when Schwarzenegger looks around, leans in, and says, "I'll be back," the audience "erupted with laughter." Right then, Cameron knew that it would become a classic movie quote.

**Famous Line:** "I am serious, and don't call me Shirley."

**Said By:** Dr. Rumack (Leslie Nielsen) in *Airplane!* (1980)

**Story:** One of the reasons *Airplane!* works so well as a comedy is its drollness. In scene after scene, the actors deliver silly lines with straight faces, and the result is one of the funniest movies of all time. That mixture of serious and silly comes from the fact that writer-directors David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, and Jerry Zucker bought the rights to a 1957 disaster film called *Zero Hour!*—which has the same plot and many of the same lines—and added jokes. For example, in *Zero Hour!*, the controller says on the phone, "He's a menace to himself and everything in the air!" That same line is in *Airplane!*, but after a pause, the controller says, "Yes, birds too." Another example, says David Zucker: "A character would say, 'Surely you can't be serious.' That was a straight line right from *Zero Hour!*. Then we would put in, 'I am serious—and don't call me Shirley.'"

For actor Leslie Nielsen, that film not only changed him from a dramatic to a comedic actor—which he'd always wanted to be—but the "Shirley" line became indelibly linked to him for the rest of his life (he died in 2010). "I thought it was amusing," he recalled, "but it never occurred to me that it was going to become a trademark." The silly pun actually earned a spot on AFI's "100 Best Movie Quotes" list.

**Half of all adult Russians have college degrees—the highest percentage of any country.**

**Famous Line:** “Here’s looking at you, kid.”

**Said By:** Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) to Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman) in *Casablanca* (1942)

**Story:** This Best Picture–winning romance set in a North African nightclub reigns supreme as the movie with the most memorable lines. In fact, six of them have made it onto the AFI’s “Top 100” list. And two weren’t even in the original script. The final line—“Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship”—was written by producer Hal Wallis after filming had completed. (Bogart was called back in to dub it.) And the movie’s most famous line wasn’t in the script, either. The story goes that in between takes, Bogart taught Bergman how to play poker, and when he won he’d say, “Here’s looking at you, kid.” After Bogie ad-libbed it an early scene set in Paris, director Michael Curtiz liked the line—and Bogie’s delivery—so much that he had him say it three more times in the film. It’s unknown where the line originated, but Bogart had used it eight years earlier in the 1934 movie *Midnight*.

**Famous Line:** “Live long and prosper.”

**Said By:** Mr. Spock (Leonard Nimoy) in *Star Trek* (1967)

**Story:** Written by science-fiction great Theodore Sturgeon, the *Star Trek* episode “Amok Time” introduced Mr. Spock’s home planet. That’s when most of Spock’s backstory was written. It’s well known among Trekkies that Nimoy invented the Vulcan hand salute himself (borrowed from an ancient Jewish blessing), but he was always quick to point out that it was Sturgeon who came up with “Live long and prosper.” Where did Sturgeon get it? Shakespeare. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo says to Balthasar, “Live, and be prosperous.” But it’s even older than that: The ancient Egyptian blessing *ankh wedja seneb* translates to “May he live, be prosperous, be healthy.” Spock and numerous other “Vulcans” have used the line through six *Star Trek* TV series and 10 *Star Trek* feature films (so far).

**Famous Line:** “My mama always said, ‘Life was like a box of chocolates—you never know what you’re gonna get.’”

**Said By:** Forrest Gump (Tom Hanks) in *Forrest Gump* (1994)

**Story:** The line in the original novel by Winston Groom was “Being an idiot is no box of chocolates,” but when screenwriter Eric Roth was adapting the story, he decided the line would work better if it sounded like an “aphorism that doesn’t particularly make sense.” So he changed it to “Life is like a box of chocolates.” When *Gump* director Robert Zemeckis read it, he asked Roth, “What the hell does this mean?” Roth’s answer: “You never know what you’re going to get.” So Zemeckis tacked on Roth’s explanation, and the rest is movie history.

**Surprise!** U.S. city with the fewest “freeway lane miles” per capita: Los Angeles.