

# SCRIPT FORMATTING GUIDELINES

## What is a screenplay?

A screenplay is a written document that includes everything that an audience sees, hears, and/or experiences while watching a film, play, or show. This can include, but is not limited to, locations, character's dialogue, and action, how the information is translated to the audience, etc. Essentially, from draft one, until the final piece of the show puzzle falls into place, a screenplay tells a story. This technical document is sometimes called a script and contains all the information that will be needed.

## Screenwriting Rule: Show, Don't Tell

Unlike in a book where you're able to spend time describing a setting, illuminating a character's most intimate thoughts, or supplying every facet of a scene, a screenplay should only include the information that can be shown on screen. For example, if a character is sad because her cat is missing, you might write a scene where the character is crying while she's hanging signs for her missing cat.

## Screenwriting tips:

- Standard script format is to use Courier or a similar monospaced font, 12 point size.
- One page of a script equals about one minute of screen time.
- Stay consistent with characters names, locations, and time of day.
- Number your scenes. Each time a location changes your start a new scene.
- Read over your script. It should be easy to read.

## Scene Heading (Slug Lines)

All scenes start with a Scene Heading; this tells the reader where the action is happening in the story. The Scene Heading includes multiple parts such as general location, specific location, and time of day with periods and hyphens used to segment each part. EX: (INT. LOCATION -TIME). Time slugs should

be either DAY or NIGHT. Begin each new scene with a centered scene heading in ALL CAPS.

- Key words:
  - Continuous - action carries on from the previous scene
  - Flashback - takes the viewer back in time
  - INT - interior location
  - EXT - exterior location

### **Action Lines and Scene Description**

Action lines are needed in every scene. Remember to keep it visual and in present tense with occasional words or phrases bolded, underlined, capitalized, or italicized for emphasis. Action line includes multiple parts such as character description, scene description, and character or object action. Sometimes referred to as "setting the scene," scene descriptions briefly describes the look, feel, weather, and any unique qualities of a setting.

### **Capitalize**

- Character names the first time they appear (ex: SAM)
- Sound Effects
- Key Details and Props

### **Character Description**

This should include a physical description of what a character looks like, sounds like, and how they walk, as well as any unique personality traits. Include a bit of descriptive, but brief information about their gender, age, personality, or appearance to help paint an image for the reader. EX:

- TIMMY (21, bleach blonde hair, eyebrow piercing).

### **Dialogue**

Put character's name (or character ID) centered over what is being said. Start a new line for each character's dialogue.

### **Dialogue Extensions**

- How it's heard

- Voice Over (V.O) - speaking over the action
- Devices - phone, etc. (INTO MICROPHONE)
- Off Screen (O.S.) - Characters voice heard but the character is not on screen
- Pre-Lap - Characters voice starts off screen and then character is on screen speaking
- How it's said (Parentheticals)
  - This is how a character is speaking. (soft), (laughs), (angrily)
  - These are brief and to the point.

### **Transitions**

Show how to move from scene to scene. They are on the right side of the script, or right justified, between each scene. Transitions are written in ALL CAPS.

Common Transitions: CUT TO, SMASH TO, DISSOLVE TO, MATCH CUT TO, INTERCUT

### **Subheaders**

Subheaders show that you are moving locations within one scene. These are placed on the next line after an action line and capitalized.

### **Shot**

Shots are in all capital letters and directs your attention to a visual.

### **Montage**

To start enter the words BEGIN MONTAGE and end with END MONTAGE.

### **Lyrics**

Keep in mind that lyrics take more time on screen but less space on the script. Consider spacing them out or describing the sequence.

## Chyrons

Text that appears on the screen. Tag by using the word CHRYON or TITLE.

Adapted from: *Screenplay format: Everything you need to know*. NFI. (2022, August 3). <https://www.nfi.edu/screenplay-format/>