

ScreenWriting

Table of Contents

ScreenWriting.....	1
Screenplay Structure.....	2
Selling your Script.....	3
July Homework.....	3
Screenwriting 101.....	4
The Basic Screenwriting Formula.....	4
The Screenwriter: A Master of Mixing Ingredients.....	4
Screenwriting: The All-Important Foundations.....	4
Screenplay Structure.....	5
Genre in Screenplays.....	5
The Concept or Premise Behind a Screenplay.....	5
Writing Characters to Lead and Support Your Story.....	6
Character Goals.....	6
Character Flaws.....	7
The Scenes That Make Up a Screenplay.....	7
Writing Tone.....	7
Screenwriting: The Finished Article.....	7
How to Write a Movie Script.....	8
What Is a Screenplay?.....	8
Understanding movie script writing.....	8
Movie script formatting rules.....	8
Scene heading (INT. APARTMENT – NIGHT).....	9
Subheading.....	10
Transitions (FADE IN, CUT TO).....	11
Character Introductions.....	11
Action (what's happening visually).....	12
Dialogue.....	12
Extensions.....	13
Parenthetical.....	13
Camera Shots.....	14
Structuring a Script.....	14
The power of outlining.....	14
Creating a Screenplay Title Page.....	15
Additional Tips:.....	15
Other important screenwriting notes.....	16
Screenplay Format Mastery.....	16
Formatting Is King.....	16
What is a Script?.....	16
Script Writing Format:.....	16
Anatomy of a Screenplay.....	16
Screenplay Formatting Sluglines.....	18
Action lines.....	19
Did You Know?.....	20
Formatting script elements.....	20
Character Cues.....	20
Dialogue.....	21
Extensions.....	22
CONTINUED (CONT'D).....	22
VOICE OVER (V.O.).....	23
OFF SCREEN (O.S.).....	23
INTO DEVICES.....	23
PRE LAP.....	23
Formatting a script for Performance - Parentheticals.....	23
Screenplay transitions.....	24
Subheaders.....	25
Shots and Camera Directions.....	26

Montage.....	27
Music and Lyrics.....	28
Chyrons.....	29
Script Formats in Different Mediums.....	30

We were lucky enough to have Owen Black (<https://courttheatre.org.nz/person/owen-black/>, <https://www.nzonscreen.com/profile/owen-black/>) introduce us to the methods and processes of ScreenWriting.

What we learned was such a different form of writing from what we're used to using. I feel it will open up quite a few new ways of looking at things. With screenwriting, the prose golden rule of "show, don't tell." goes out the window. Because a screenplay is the blueprint for the production of something else, it needs to be explicit in describing what the audience will see, and provide guidance for the myriad of production team leads who will comb through it looking for what they need to build, have on hand, price out, hire, transport, direct ... The screenplay is used to develop the daily *Call Sheet* which is issued to the cast and crew of a film production to inform them of where and when they should report for a particular day of filming.

After the session, I will admit I spent a fun few hours last night looking up scripts and then seeing how they compared with the starting scenes of their movies – and maybe watching a bit more than just the starting scene ... to get the flavour of the movie ... you know ...

A good one was *Pirates of the Caribbean – Curse of the Black Pearl* where the writing is very exacting but there are one or two places where they have come up with a slight modification which worked well. It was interesting to see where there were places in the script where they were intending to give the audience an impression, but it didn't quite come across that way (at least to me).

The example is near the beginning when WILL TURNER gives Governor SWANN the sword that will be presented to the soon to be Commodore NORRINGTON. SWANN says to pass on his complements to WILL's master. In the script it says;

"Will's face falls. Clearly, the work is his, and he is proud of it. With practiced ease, he flips the sword around, catches it by the hilt and returns it to the case."

I wouldn't have picked that Will had made it from Orlando Bloom's face falling, or the slightly forced smile he gives.

A good place to find scripts is: Scriptslug – <https://www.scriptslug.com/>. For the *Pirates of the Caribbean – Curse of the Black Pearl* for example, go to <https://www.scriptslug.com/script/pirates-of-the-caribbean-the-curse-of-the-black-pearl-2003>, and click on the *Read* button.

Screenplay Structure

One of the biggest surprises for me was learning how structured screenplays are. I had not realised that they needed to be so exacting. But seeing as they need to be read by multiple people with all sorts of different roles, as well as those producing the movie, it makes sense to have a standard format which they can efficiently work through to identify what, and who is needed when.

Once I starting doing my homework, converting a story of mine to a screenplay, I quickly realised that I needed a good guide to the industry standard format. I found some excellent guides on the web.

<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/brilliant-script-screenplay-format/>

and

<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/how-to-write-a-screenplay/>

I have captured the content of these two pages later in this article.

[How to Write a Movie Script](#)

[Screenplay Format Mastery](#)

Incidentally, *Studio Binder* is software to correctly format screenplays, thereby leaving the writer to concentrate on that creative process. This leads me on to software for writing screenplays.

As Owen mentioned there is Screenwriting Software around which takes care of a lot of the formatting rules of screenwriting and keeps track of a whole lot of other things, such as scenes, characters, etc and is able to provide reports on all the different elements. The one Owen recommended is **Fadeln** which can be

downloaded here: <https://www.fadeinpro.com/page.pl?content=download>. You can use it for 30 days hassle free and continue to use it free after that if you can put up with being reminded that there is a paid version.

Having found out that there is such a thing as Screenwriting Software, I had a further look around.

There is another which is totally free and opensource called **Trelby**. You can find it here;

<https://trelby.org/>

This is the one I have chosen to work with.

There are also a bunch of online ones which don't appear to charge:

<https://open-draft.com/>

<https://openwrite.vercel.app/>

For masochists, there is writing the scripts directly in a markdown format called **Fountain**.

<https://fountain.io/how-to/>

Most Screenwriting Software will read this format. The format can then be processed into a pdf with the correct formatting by programs like Trelby or FadeIn, or by dedicated renderers like Afterword.

<https://afterwriting.com/>

Selling your Script

Owen also talked about what is required to sell your script. Other than conforming to the industry standards, Genre is a big factor. This needs to come across in the first page. Genre is about anticipation, a list of conventions and tropes that an audience comes to expect from a particular type of story. If a genre film doesn't deliver on these conventions, it disengages the potential audience. But, then you also want to avoid cliché. It is easy to see why *churn the handle* movies come about – er. *Shrek 41 – Lost in Space* maybe?

A great deal hangs on the first page. For some background reading on the art of creating a screenplay, take a look at this webpage.

<https://industrialscripts.com/screenwriting-guide/>

I have captured the content of this page later in this article.

[Screenwriting 101](#)

July Homework

There was mention of homework. What we're suggesting is that you take one of your own stories, or a story you know very well (scene from a book you've read, or dig into a fairy tale. Etc), and convert it to a screenplay. For top marks sell your story to one of the big studios and get it made into a feature length movie ... or create something brand new and never before seen, if you wish.

Screenwriting 101

Your Ultimate 10-Minute Guide

<https://industrialscripts.com/screenwriting-guide/>

Whether you are new to screenwriting or a seasoned scriptwriter, there always comes a time in your screenwriting career when you find yourself struggling.

This can prove to be a difficult time for any creative, but the nature of screenwriting is such that there are always certain base rules and formulas to fall back on. Obviously, it's important to ride a line – following every rule in the book too religiously nets you a pretty formulaic script. There's always room for a little flair. Equally, these formulas exist for a reason – they work.

The Basic Screenwriting Formula

All screenplays (believe it or not, even the idiosyncratic ones) follow a broad formula, and they follow it perhaps a little more closely than other storytelling media because of, among other things, time.

A film's story unfolds across 90-120 minutes (usually). This places certain pressures on narrative structure that other media don't have to stick to quite as rigidly.

As Robert McKee puts it:

"All writing is discipline, but screenwriting is a drill sergeant."

At its most basic level, a story in film concerns a central character or characters, a drastic change in their lives that presents some form of choice or goal, and then their subsequent attempts and/or failures in response to that change/goal.

This is story at the atomic level, and it's rare to find a film that doesn't adhere to it in some form or other. Obviously, it isn't the be-all and end-all of story, but it allows for neat, dramatic structures in which we set up a character's world, shake that world to its core, and force them into making drastic, affecting choices.

Little blueprints like this help because screenwriting isn't just whatever comes to you; you need to use all the right ingredients.

The Screenwriter: A Master of Mixing Ingredients

Paul Schrader, writer of 1976 classic TAXI DRIVER, has some well-known words of wisdom:

"I could be just a writer very easily. I am not a writer – I am a screenwriter, which is half a filmmaker..."

This is one of the most important tenets of screenwriting: you're writing prospectively. You're writing something that is ultimately going to be audio-visual, and that has a whole host of implications. You, as a screenwriter, have certain obligations to fulfil:

You must follow universal scriptwriting conventions;

- Format your script correctly;
- You must strive to meet the demands of the people you're initially writing your script for: directors, producers;
- You must strive to meet the demands of the people you're ultimately writing the script for: your audience.

Revered Swedish writer-director Ingmar Bergman hits the nail square on the head:

"Film as dream, film as music. No form of art goes beyond ordinary consciousness as film does, straight to our emotions, deep into the twilight room of the soul..."

Again, it's a line – utilising the tools and formulas of the trade without showing them too clearly. That's how you immerse an audience.

Screenwriting: The All-Important Foundations

For the purpose of this guide, it is helpful to consider screenwriting in terms of building a house. You must start with strong foundations.

Build your house without these foundations and you'll find that you'll run into difficulties later on when you're putting the finishing touches to your house. Worse still, without the foundations your house is going to crumble and fall.

Screenwriting can be viewed in much the same way. When you build a house you have a blueprint – a methodology to follow.

Robert Altman, writer of MASH and The Long Goodbye, confirms this:

"I don't think screenplay writing is the same as writing — I mean, I think it's blueprinting".

Screenplay Structure

First comes structure: your script must follow a clear act structure, it should be properly sequenced and there should be a defined plot, meaning events should be causally linked to one another rather than a series of 'and then' sequential events. These form an important skeleton structure around which the rest of your script can be built.

A key element of structure in film is the idea of set-up and pay-off. It's one of the simplest and most common structural techniques in screenwriting and yet it's often either misused or forgotten entirely.

To take a simple example:

In 2017's GET OUT, we establish early on that victims of the 'Coagula process' are incapacitated by the flash of a camera, when Chris takes a photo of Dre during a party. When Chris finds himself under attack towards the end of the film, he uses this knowledge to incapacitate his attacker.

So, we set something up passively, then bring it back into the story when it proves useful or relevant.

Failing to set something up ahead of time can lead to a '*deus ex machina*', when the solution to our character's problems end up feeling like they come out of nowhere. If our protagonist is going to get out of a bind by using a knife hidden in their sock, we need to see them place the knife there earlier in the story. If we don't, it looks like a massive plot contrivance.

On the other side of the spectrum, failure to pay something off leaves us with the '*Chekhov's Gun*' problem. Why include something seemingly important if we're not going to use it?

The fundamental point here is this: in screenwriting, structure has to be cohesive, and set-up/pay-off is a clear example of this cohesion. Everything needs to have wider purpose in the story. If it doesn't, we don't need it to build the house.

Genre in Screenplays

But there's another foundational element at work in screenwriting – genre, the conceptual framework into which the story fits. Genre is about anticipation, a list of conventions and tropes that an audience comes to expect from a particular type of story:

- In a horror film we expect a group of people to face an insidious, often-supernatural threat. We expect at least some (probably most) to die.
- In fantasy we expect grandiose clashes between good and evil. We expect journeys, quests, swords, and a threat that has the potential to destroy or take over the world.
- In a romantic comedy we expect two characters to overcome their initial differences and forge a romantic relationship. Maybe they dramatically break up a wedding.

If a genre film doesn't deliver on these conventions, it disengages the potential audience. So, again, we reach that same formulaic problem as above – adhering to formula vs taking your script in an original direction.

As Robert McKee puts it:

"The challenge is to keep convention but avoid cliché."

The Concept or Premise Behind a Screenplay

Finally there's concept – the specific controlling idea or set of ideas that form the basis of the story.

A hapless businessman who accidentally discovers his boss is doing underhand deals with a national enemy. A musician struggling to find work in a world rendered deaf after a cataclysmic space something something. These are concepts.

So we have our three foundational pillars of screenwriting: structure, genre, concept. Of course, there's scope for originality in all three. But it's the final one that's the real key:

Stray too far from structural convention and your story can end up meandering aimlessly. Even fractured narratives like, say, PULP FICTION or MEMENTO tend to hit certain dramatic moments at the same points as linear ones.

Stray too far from genre convention and the story becomes unrecognisable. It becomes impossible to wield any control over audience expectation which makes it pretty much impossible to break those expectations.

Concept, however, doesn't really have a formula. It's the foundation that seeps inextricably into the other two. If your concept involves a retired assassin coming out of retirement to save his mother-in-law who happens to be the Vice President, that has:

- immediate genre implications (we're probably looking at an action thriller)
- which in turn have structural implications (our first act should most likely involve sketching out the protagonist's past, their skill, and the inciting kidnapping)

If there's a phrase that ultimately sums up the most effective approach to screenwriting, it's:

The same, but different

Fresh concepts, structures and blends of genres are never a bad thing, but it's by using existing formulas and conventions as a base that a screenwriter is able to take stories in noticeably new directions. **We have to set expectations to break them.**

Screenwriting: Bricks and Mortar. Once you have your sturdy screenwriting foundations in place you're ready to build the figurative walls in this extended, construction-related analogy.

Writing Characters to Lead and Support Your Story

This brings us to character. Of course, the foundations of the script have some influence here too – we have certain character expectations based on the core elements of the film.

We expect the detectives in a crime thriller to be consistently at odds with one another, and we expect their chief to be a bit caustic. Again, these expectations give us scope to do something new with our screenwriting. Far more important to character however, are motivations, goals, and obstacles. First, we need to know what a character wants...

This could be something grand and overarching like escaping their mundane life and fulfilling their destiny (Luke in STAR WARS) or something trivial and basic like replacing a ruined rug (THE BIG LEBOWSKI).

As THE SOCIAL NETWORK and THE WEST WING writer Aaron Sorkin puts it:

"Rather than tell the audience who a character is, I like to show the audience what a character wants."

Without knowing what it is a character wants, we have no real way of moving a story forward without barraging that character with a series of unrelated events to get a rise out of them. This leaves us with a 'passive protagonist' and dull screenwriting.

A story in which:

a character is robbed of their life savings,
which forces them to take whatever work they can get,
work at which their corrupt boss manipulates them into helping him embezzle money from the company,
which in turn lands them in prison,
where they meet a guy who tells them he knows who has their money,
who gives it up out of fear when they finally confront him

...is one in which our protagonist isn't making any meaningful choices. Everything is happening to them.

In a Screenplay, Your Characters Need Goals, Choices Obstacles and Flaws

Character Goals

Giving them a clear goal allows them to make choices in pursuit of that goal.

- Perhaps when the character is robbed of their money, they seek to hunt down the person who took it from them.
- This plunges them into a criminal underworld in which they must endear themselves to friends of the thief by assisting in a few crimes of their own.
- They end up quite liking some of their new acquaintances, but still manipulate them to get to their target.
- Ultimately they discover that the person who took their money did so to help his dying mother, and are faced with...
- a choice – take back what's theirs or accept that maybe they're no better than the thief, who needs it even more than they do.

Neither of these stories are particularly great, but in this version, our protagonist has a clear goal, takes steps to achieve it, and must deal with the consequences. This makes for a more engaging character and better screenwriting. They become active rather than remaining reactive.

Character Flaws

The other essential component of any character is a 'flaw'. Watching a perfect character tackling a problem perfectly and ending the narrative every bit as perfect as they perfectly started it isn't the foundation of anything close to drama. Again, it's a recipe for dull screenwriting.

For a character to be engaging, even likeable, they have to be deeply flawed. Even more importantly, this flaw has to relate in some way to their central goal. If our protagonist's central goal is to reunite with her estranged daughter, it's no use to us, dramatically speaking, if her biggest flaw is her inability to finish her novel.

These two things just aren't going to interact in any meaningful way. She needs to be someone too proud to apologise; someone whose own relationship with her mother has so damaged her that she visits on the same problems on her daughter.

A character's flaw needs to present a concrete obstacle to them achieving their goal.

The Scenes That Make Up a Screenplay

At their most basic, scenes pit two or more characters with opposing goals against one another, either explicitly (punching) or implicitly (indirect speech), and resolve when that minor conflict reaches its conclusion (another reason why 'goals' are so important).

These opposing goals can range from the overt (two characters trying to beat one another up) to the more subtle (a character tries to cheer up her brother; her brother wants to wallow in his misery), but the overarching point is this: scenes hinge on argument.

Having characters that consistently agree with one another will never be dramatic because it doesn't force conflict, change and resolution. This is why even in sweeping epics about good vs evil, we still have a multitude of smaller conflicts at work between the core 'good' characters.

STAR WARS wouldn't work if Luke, Han and Leia got on like a house on fire from day one. Nor would LORD OF THE RINGS if the fellowship did the same.

Conflict allows for growth. The events the characters go through feel more significant because we see those events change the characters, bring them together over time. A scene without conflict often feels either completely flat or obviously expository. Good screenwriting should seek to avoid either.

Writing Tone

Tone is often overlooked, but massively important in screenwriting. Again, this takes cues from everything above, from the script's genre, its structure, its characters. Tone is a bit of a nebulous term, but it's probably best described as the feel of a film, and it's something that it's essential to set up in any narrative world right away.

Think of it like this – if our story is set in a dark, dystopian world in which we follow a lone, young orphan girl struggling to survive on grim, futuristic streets, we probably don't want to open with a warm, funny moment.

Tone sets a precedent, and it's important to make sure it's the right one. These are the elements in which a screenwriter's voice, their flair, really has a chance to shine. Structural and generic conventions are key to any script, even those that seek to break the mold, but specific characters and moments ultimately come from the writer.

The (slightly drawn out) house analogy comes into its own again here: You want to build your foundations in a tried-and-tested way, as they're responsible for keeping the whole things standing, but when it comes to the actual appearance of the house, the height of the walls, the colour, the type of brick... ...the choice is yours.

Screenwriting: The Finished Article

If you have considered all of the above, then you should be on the way to starting your script. For a more in-depth look at the skills and processes required, it's worth taking an online screenwriting course.

If you encounter any issues during your screenwriting, then these wise words from Beat Generation author Jack Kerouac may be worth remembering:

"It ain't whatcha write, it's the way atcha write it."

How to Write a Movie Script

Screenplay Format and Examples

<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/how-to-write-a-screenplay/>

By SC Lannom

Understanding how to write a screenplay, also known as a movie script, can seem daunting at first, but once you understand script format and structure, you can focus on your creativity. Grasping the basics of screenplay format will ensure your ideas are communicated clearly and professionally. We'll take you through the process of writing a screenplay so that you can begin building that great movie idea into a professional script. Bottom line: If you're wondering how to write a script, this guide will give you the steps.

What Is a Screenplay?

Understanding movie script writing

A screenplay is the industry standard document that serves as the foundation for a film. Understanding how to write a film script involves mastering structure, screenplay format, and storytelling techniques. Proper film script format helps ensure that a screenplay is easy to read and execute during production. For those learning how to write a script, knowing proper screenplay structure is crucial. A movie script length typically ranges from 70 to 120 pages, with most feature films averaging around 110 pages. This length is crucial because one page of script format equals roughly one minute of screen time. A strong grasp of movie script format helps ensure your screenplay is production-ready.

Understanding how to write a screenplay goes beyond just length—it's about mastering the structure, formatting, and visual storytelling that makes a script effective. In this guide, we'll break down scriptwriting step by step, ensuring you grasp the movie script format and essential screenplay elements like scene headings plot points, and how to format dialogue and action lines correctly.

Movie script formatting rules

To format a screenplay correctly, follow industry standards that ensure clarity and readability. Every scriptwriter must understand formatting rules to ensure their screenplay is industry-ready. Whether you're using software or doing it manually, knowing how to format script elements properly is essential.

A well-structured film script format ensures clarity and ease of production. If you're learning how to write a film script, mastering formatting is key to making your screenplay look professional. This structure is essential for scriptwriters aiming for a professional film script format. So, how do you format a script to meet industry expectations?

Here's how to properly format your movie script:

- **Font:** Always use Courier font (12-point)—it ensures a consistent page-to-screen ratio where one page equals roughly one minute of screen time.
- **Margins:**
 - Left: 1.5 inches (for hole-punching and binding)
 - Right, Top & Bottom: 1 inch
- **Line Spacing:** Each page contains about 55 lines, balancing readability and efficiency.
- **Dialogue Formatting:** Character names should always be in uppercase, positioned 3.7 inches from the left margin.
- **Character Names:** Must have uppercase letters and be positioned starting 3.7 inches from the left side of the page
- **Page Numbers:** Placed in the top-right corner, beginning on page two. These standards ensure that when you format script elements properly, your screenplay will meet industry expectations from start to finish.

StudioBinder screenwriting software does all the required formatting so you can focus on the creative. Below is a formatted script example that you can click to examine further:

The screenshot displays the StudioBinder interface with a sample screenplay and callouts explaining formatting rules:

- SCENE HEADING**: One line description of the location and time of day.
- ACTION**: The description of the actions in a scene.
- CHARACTER**: Identifies the character who is speaking.
- DIALOGUE**: The lines of speech your character says.
- INTERCUT**: Instructions when cutting to multiple locations.
- SUBHEADER**: Used when there are minor changes in a location.
- FADE IN**: Marks the start of the screenplay.
- SCENE NUMBER**: Generally numbered only in the shooting script.
- TRANSITION**: Used as transitional instructions for editing.
- EXTENSION**: Clarifies where a character is when they can't be seen.
- PARENTHETICAL**: Provides info on how the actor should say the line.
- SHOT**: Indicates the camera angle or movement in a scene.

The sample screenplay text includes:

```

FADE IN:
1 EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT
WE OPEN on a modern suburban home. The front window illuminated by the lights inside. We see the silhouette of a small human figure as it runs back and forth. We push in closer as we slowly see a BOY running around the house.
CUT TO:
2 INT. SUBURBAN HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT
A GREEN BALL sits on a counter top. A young hand snatches it. It belongs to FILBERT (9), wiry, lost in his own imaginary world. Dressed as a Knight. A toy sword in his other hand.
FILBERT (V.O.)
This is my castle. I am sworn to protect it. Anyone that stands in my way shall bear the wrath of the almighty--
Just then, the babysitter walks by. BECKY (23), trendy, distracted. She is mid-phone call with Filbert's Mom, TRACY.
BECKY
(into phone)
Oh yeah, he's being good. He's just fighting orcs or trolls.
INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION
TRACY
Oh that's perfectly normal.
Filbert lifts his sword into the air, lets out a big battle cry, and sprints from the kitchen to --
HALLWAY
Filbert comes around the corner, distracted by his fantasy, bumps into the wall. His favorite ball slips from his hand. Everything slows down for Filbert.
FILBERT'S POV
IN SLOW MOTION - The ball tumbles down the stairs. WE HEAR each bounce echo as the ball travels down the steps.
  
```

How to write a screenplay • Scriptwriting formatting rules in StudioBinder

Many scripts begin with a transition, which may include **FADE IN:** or **BLACK SCREEN**. Professional screenplay writing software ensures your script adheres to industry standards automatically. Some place this in the top left, others in the top right of the page, where many transitions live. If you're learning to format script transitions, keep consistency across pages. Other scripts will begin with scene headings or even subheadings of imagery they want to front-load.

Scene heading (**INT. APARTMENT – NIGHT**)

The scene heading is there to help break up physical spaces and give the reader and production team an idea of the story's geography.

You will either choose **INT.** for interior spaces or **EXT.** for exterior spaces. Wondering how you format a script that moves from one location to another? Then, a description of the setting, and then the time of day.

Here's a screenplay example:

The screenshot shows the StudioBinder interface for a script titled "The Last Goodbye". The screenplay text is as follows:

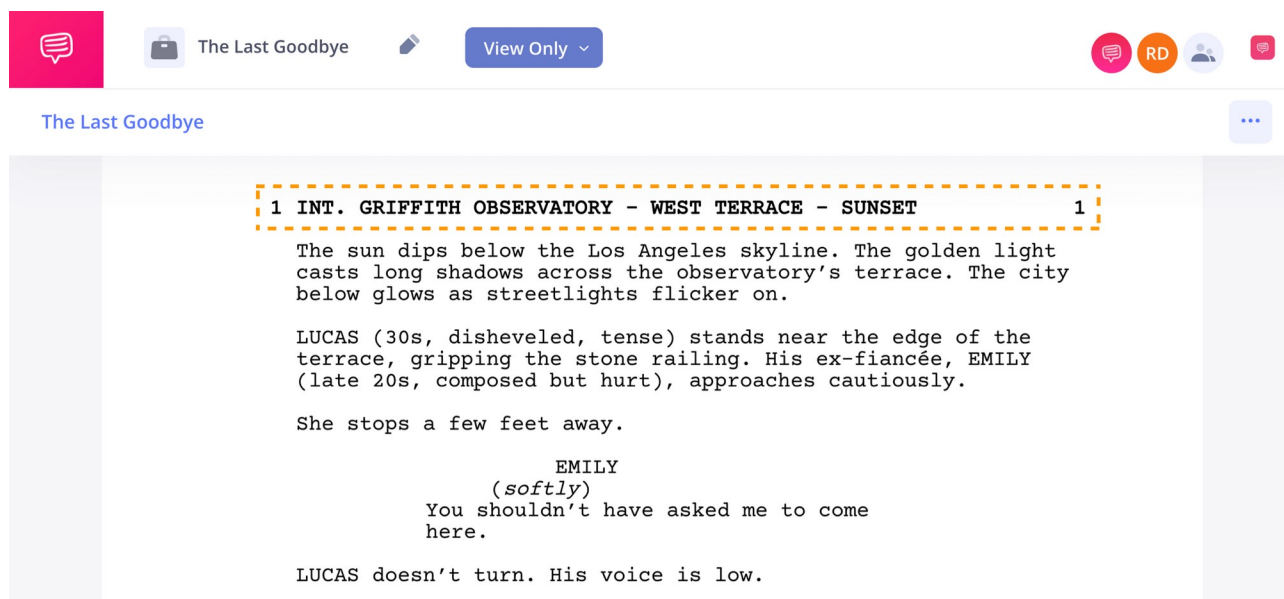
```

1 INT. GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY - SUNSET
The sun dips below the Los Angeles skyline. The golden light casts long shadows across the observatory's terrace. The city below glows as streetlights flicker on.
LUCAS (30s, disheveled, tense) stands near the edge of the terrace, gripping the stone railing. His ex-fiancée, EMILY (late 20s, composed but hurt), approaches cautiously.
She stops a few feet away.
EMILY
(softly)
You shouldn't have asked me to come here.
LUCAS doesn't turn. His voice is low.
  
```

Script format example: Scene Heading

There are rare cases where the scene begins inside and goes outside, or vice versa, and in these situations, you may write **INT/EXT.** or **EXT/INT.**

Some scripts take place all around the world, so often screenwriters will use multiple hyphens to give the scene headings even more detail:



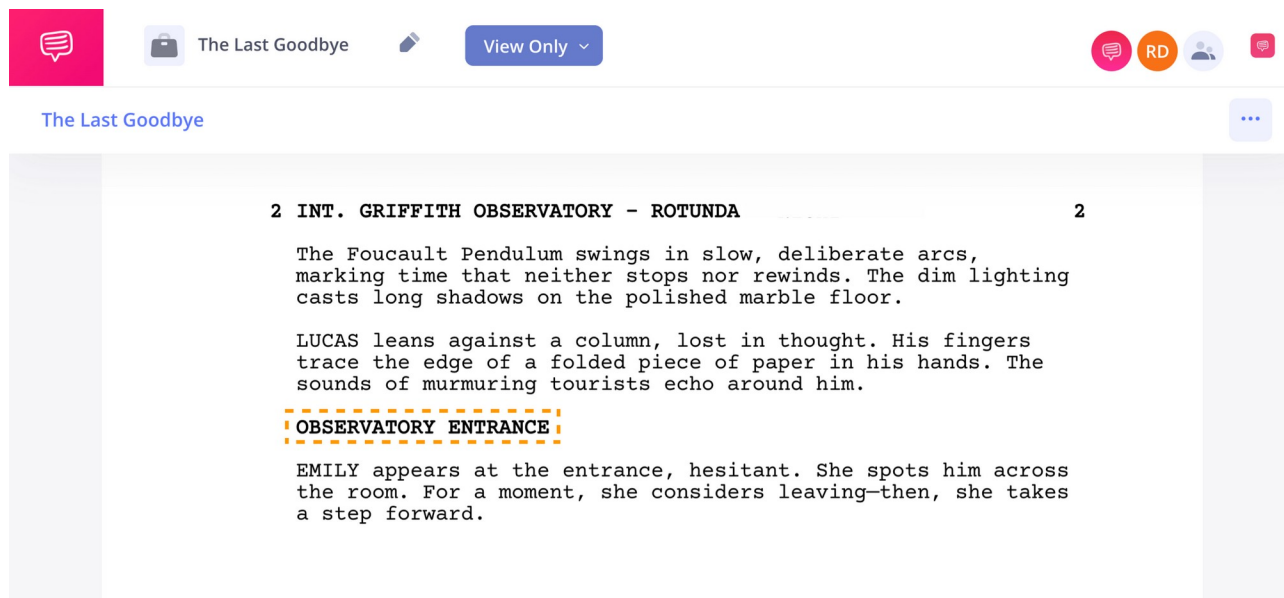
Screenplay format example in StudioBinder Screenwriting App: Scene Heading Details

This helps the screenwriter avoid having to point out the geographical location in the action lines, saving space to write more about the actual story and keep readers engaged in the story, not the formatting.

Subheading

Often, writers will use subheadings to show a change in location without breaking the scene, even if the scene has shifted from **INT.** to **EXT.**

Here's a script example:



Script formatting example: Scene Subheading

It is assumed that readers will understand the change in space while retaining the idea that the time of day is the same - even continuous.

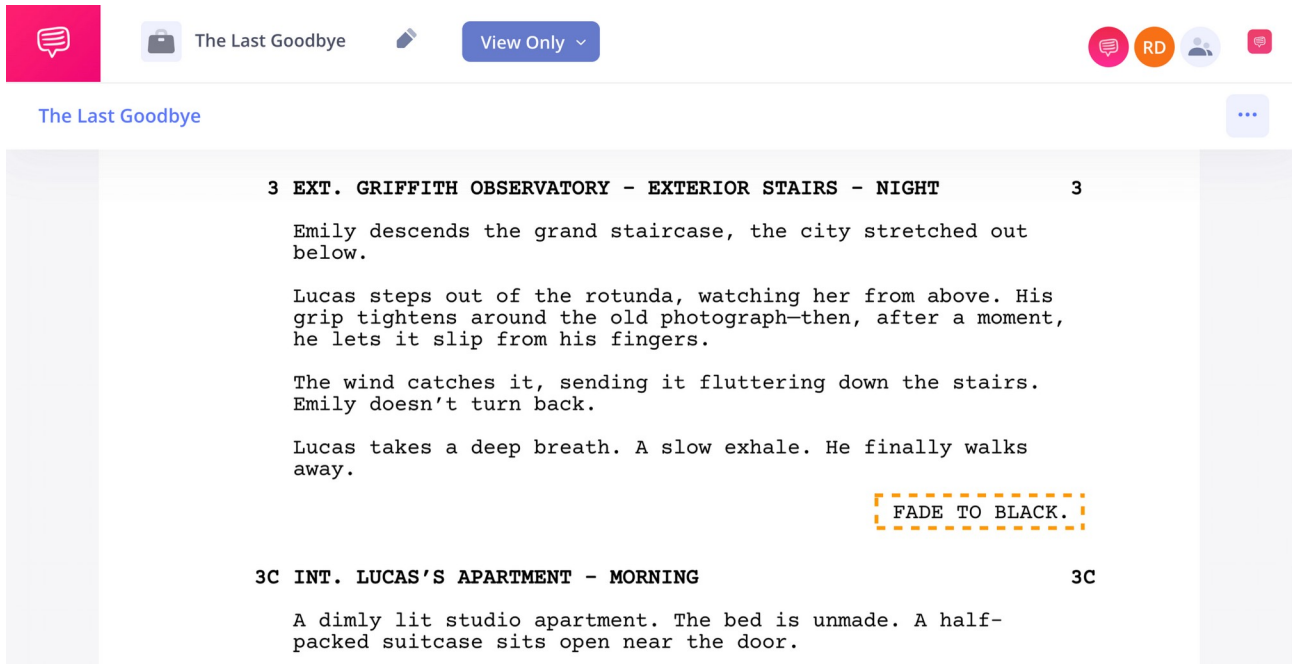
The reason many writers do this is to avoid the notion that we've entered an entirely new scene, though you could always include **CONTINUOUS** in place of **DAY** or **NIGHT** by creating an entirely new scene heading.

It's a matter of personal style and rhythm vs. production considerations.

Transitions (FADE IN, CUT TO)

In the bottom right of the page, you will place transitions, but in modern screenwriting, these seem to be used less and less. The transitions that seem to have stood the test of time are **CUT TO** and **FADE OUT**. Learning how to write script transitions properly helps maintain flow and pacing.

Here's a screenplay example:



The screenshot shows a screenplay interface for a project titled "The Last Goodbye". The scene is labeled "3 EXT. GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY - EXTERIOR STAIRS - NIGHT" with a page number "3" in the top right. The scene description includes Emily descending a staircase, Lucas watching her from above, and the wind catching a photograph. The scene ends with "FADE TO BLACK." in a dashed orange box. The next scene is labeled "3C INT. LUCAS'S APARTMENT - MORNING" with a page number "3C". The scene description includes a dimly lit studio apartment with an unmade bed and a half-packed suitcase.

3 EXT. GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY - EXTERIOR STAIRS - NIGHT 3

Emily descends the grand staircase, the city stretched out below.

Lucas steps out of the rotunda, watching her from above. His grip tightens around the old photograph—then, after a moment, he lets it slip from his fingers.

The wind catches it, sending it fluttering down the stairs. Emily doesn't turn back.

Lucas takes a deep breath. A slow exhale. He finally walks away.

FADE TO BLACK.

3C INT. LUCAS'S APARTMENT - MORNING 3C

A dimly lit studio apartment. The bed is unmade. A half-packed suitcase sits open near the door.

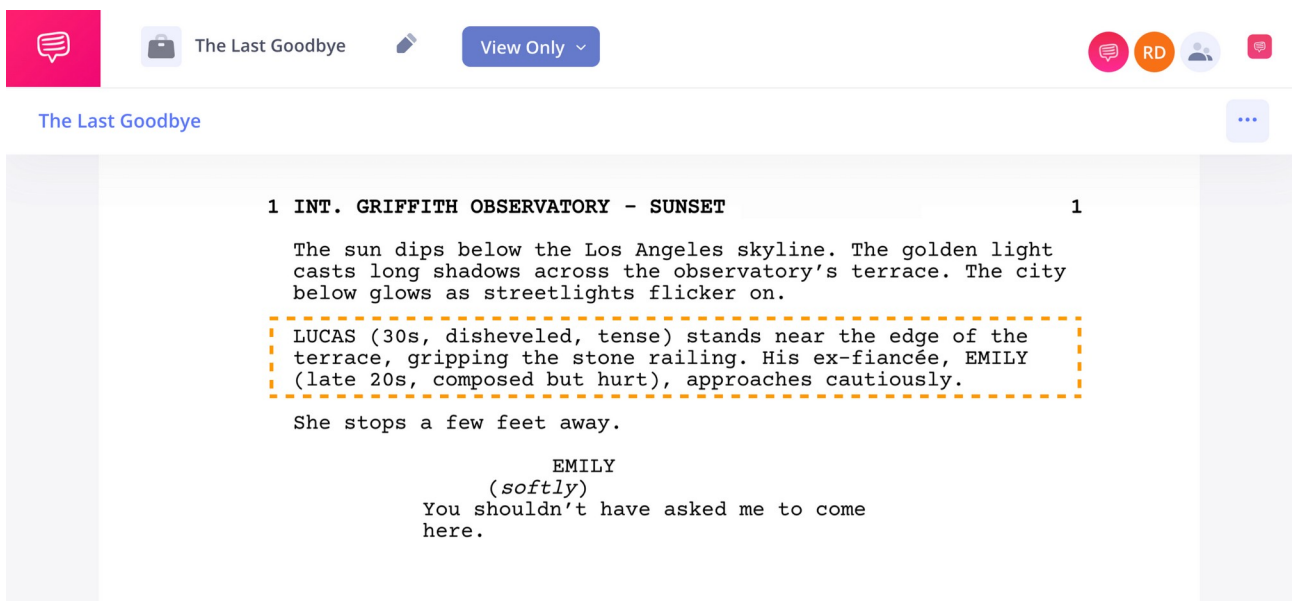
Screenplay formatting example: Scene Transition

You may also include something like **DISSOLVE TO**: but these are used less and less, probably for the same reason you avoid camera shots.

Character Introductions

When you introduce a character in a screenplay, you want to use all capital letters for the name of the character, then a reference to their age, and finally some information about their traits and personality.

Here's a screenplay example:



The screenshot shows a screenplay interface for a project titled "The Last Goodbye". The scene is labeled "1 INT. GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY - SUNSET" with a page number "1" in the top right. The scene description includes the sun dipping below the Los Angeles skyline. A character introduction for Lucas is shown in a dashed orange box, followed by Emily's entrance and dialogue.

1 INT. GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY - SUNSET 1

The sun dips below the Los Angeles skyline. The golden light casts long shadows across the observatory's terrace. The city below glows as streetlights flicker on.

LUCAS (30s, disheveled, tense) stands near the edge of the terrace, gripping the stone railing. His ex-fiancée, **EMILY (late 20s, composed but hurt)**, approaches cautiously.

She stops a few feet away.

EMILY
(softly)
You shouldn't have asked me to come here.

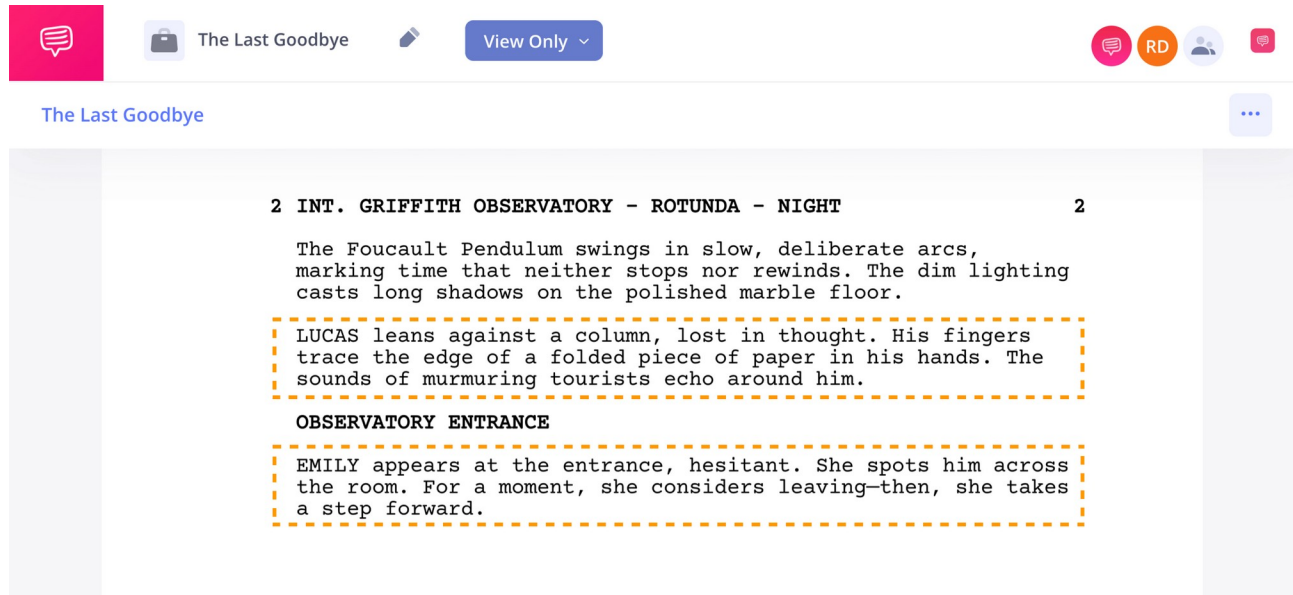
Script format example: Character Introduction

Again, screenwriters have found other ways to do this, but this is the most common and production-friendly way to introduce a character. Understanding how to write script character entries effectively sets the tone for your entire scene.

Action (what's happening visually)

Action lines are where you describe the visual and audible actions that take place on screen. You want to write in the third person in the present tense.

Here's a script example:



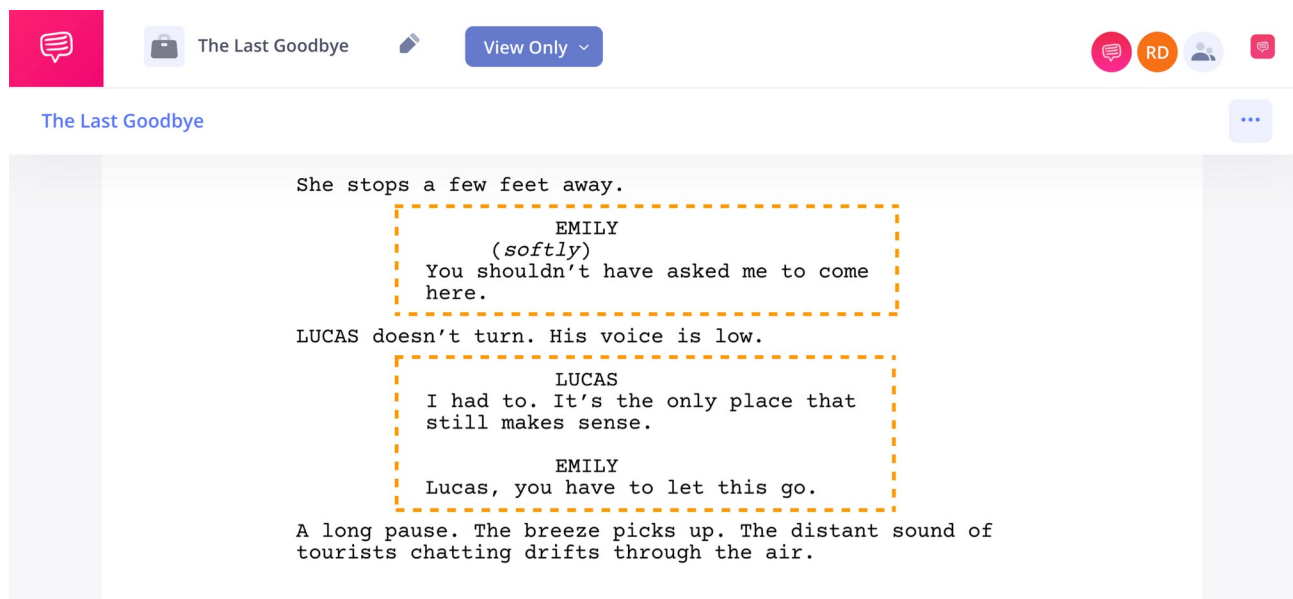
Script format example: Action Lines

Often, you can make your script a better read by eliminating redundant pronouns and conjunctions. Big sounds and important objects can be written out in ALL CAPS to emphasize their effect on the story. If you're looking for script writing how to guides that elevate your action lines, this formatting trick is essential.

Dialogue

Your lines of dialogue will be set underneath the character to which they are assigned. Dialogue is pretty straightforward from a formatting standpoint, but it is the most difficult part of screenwriting.

Here's a great example to check out:

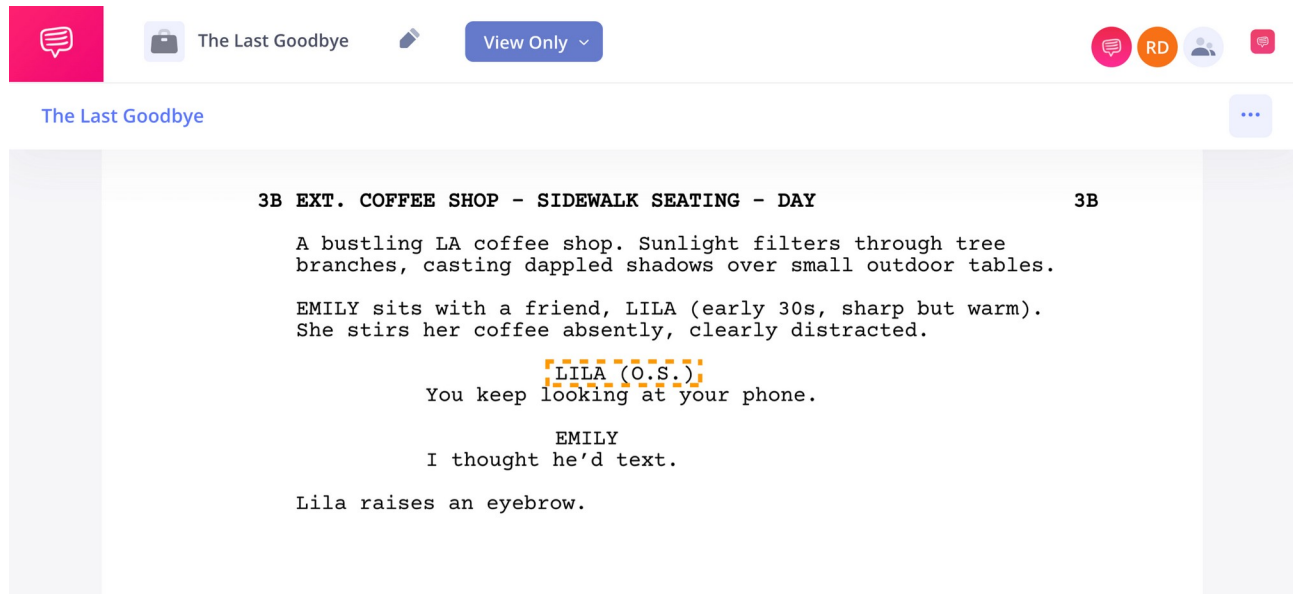


How to write a how to write a screenplay: Dialogue Lines

Extensions

These occur when a character says something off-screen (**O.S.**) or if the dialogue is voice-over (**V.O.**). You will see extensions when a character ends a block of dialogue, performs an action, and speaks more.

Here's a script example:



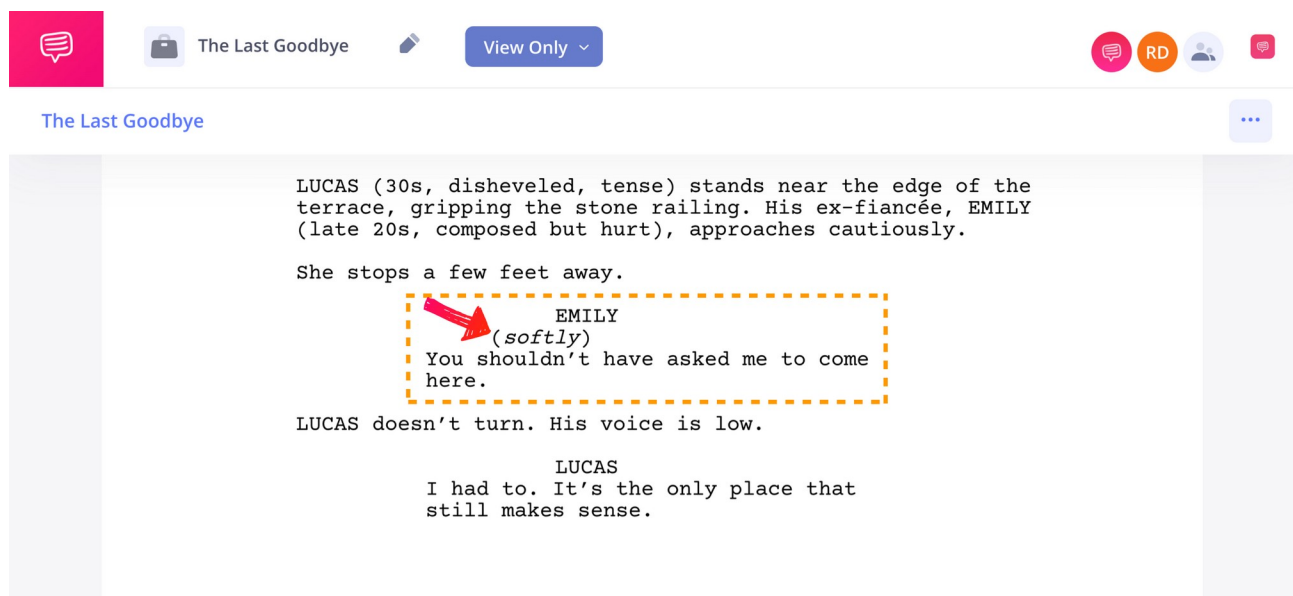
Screenplay format example: Extensions

This takes the form of continued (**CONT'D**). Professional scriptwriting software will help you with this, but it will not be able to predict when you want something said off-screen or in voice-over.

Parenthetical

You can use a parenthetical inside your dialogue to show small actions or even a change in mood without having to jump out to an action line.

Here's a screenplay example:



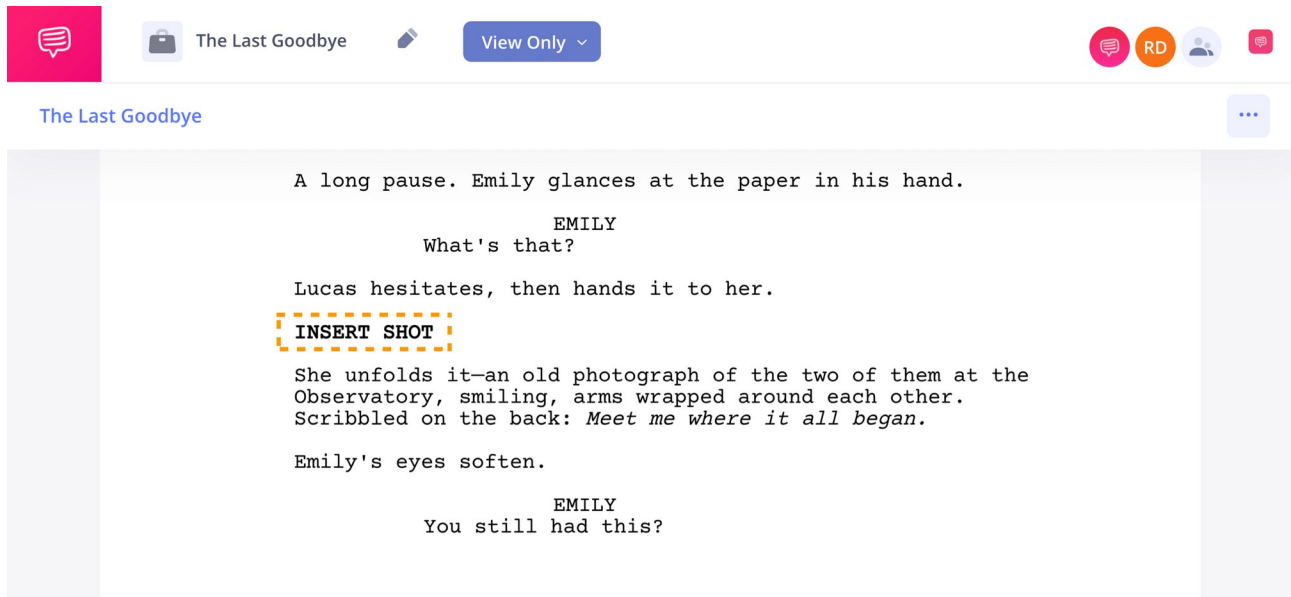
How to write a screenplay: Parenthetical

Parentheticals are good for directing actors and adding sarcasm and nuance to performances on the page, but you may want to be cautious about adding them too much. Use them sparingly and only when they help clarify how to format script intent within dialogue. Actors are professionals, and if Al Pacino finds parentheticals in a script, he may get his feelings hurt.

Camera Shots

The best professional screenwriters know how to suggest shots without actually writing in shots, but if you insist on describing a particular shot in your screenplay, you can format it like a subheading.

Here's a script example



Script format example: Camera Shot

This lets us know that the shot is supposed to be set so that we see things from Filbert's perspective. Writing out shots is often frowned upon, but if you're directing the film, maybe do it sparingly. In these cases, it's helpful to know how to format script directions so they support the visual language of the scene.

Structuring a Script

Story structure is more than just formatting—it's the foundation that turns an idea into a compelling screenplay. While some argue that classic structures lead to formulaic movies, the reality is that structure helps create stories that resonate with audiences. At its core, a screenplay thrives on a strong central conflict that keeps the narrative moving forward, whether it's a romance film or a thriller.

So why does structure matter? Because any script readers, production companies, studios, and executives rely on it. They've spent years refining the business of storytelling, and most successful films follow some form of classic structure. While not every writer or director follows it rigidly, all professionals understand it, including film industry veterans.

Many frameworks exist, such as *Save The Cat*, *The Three-Act Structure*, *The Hero's Journey*, and *The Story Circle*. But at a fundamental level, every story follows a character arc progression that reflects the human experience:

1. **Exposition** – Introduces the characters, setting, and conflict.
2. **Rising Action** – The stakes increase, obstacles arise & the protagonist is tested.
3. **Midpoint** – A major turning point that shifts the story's direction.
4. **Climax** – The tension peaks and the protagonist faces their greatest challenge.
5. **Falling Action** – Consequences unfold, leading toward resolution.
6. **Resolution** – The story finds closure, whether satisfying or open-ended.

Following this structure doesn't mean sacrificing creativity. Instead, it provides a roadmap that keeps your screenplay focused and engaging.

The power of outlining

One essential tool for structuring your script is a screenplay outline. Think of it as a navigation map for your road trip—it keeps you from getting lost on your way to the final draft. A strong outline includes:

- **Story beats** – Key moments that drive the narrative forward.
- **Scene breakdowns** – The purpose of each scene and how it connects to others.
- **Page count estimates** – Helps maintain pacing and balance.

If you're struggling with writer's block, an outline can keep you on track and ensure your story unfolds in a way that makes sense. Plus, producers and studios expect to see a structured approach—they want to know they can bank on your screenplay before investing time and money.

Mastering story structure doesn't mean limiting your creativity; it means giving your ideas the best chance to succeed.

Creating a Screenplay Title Page

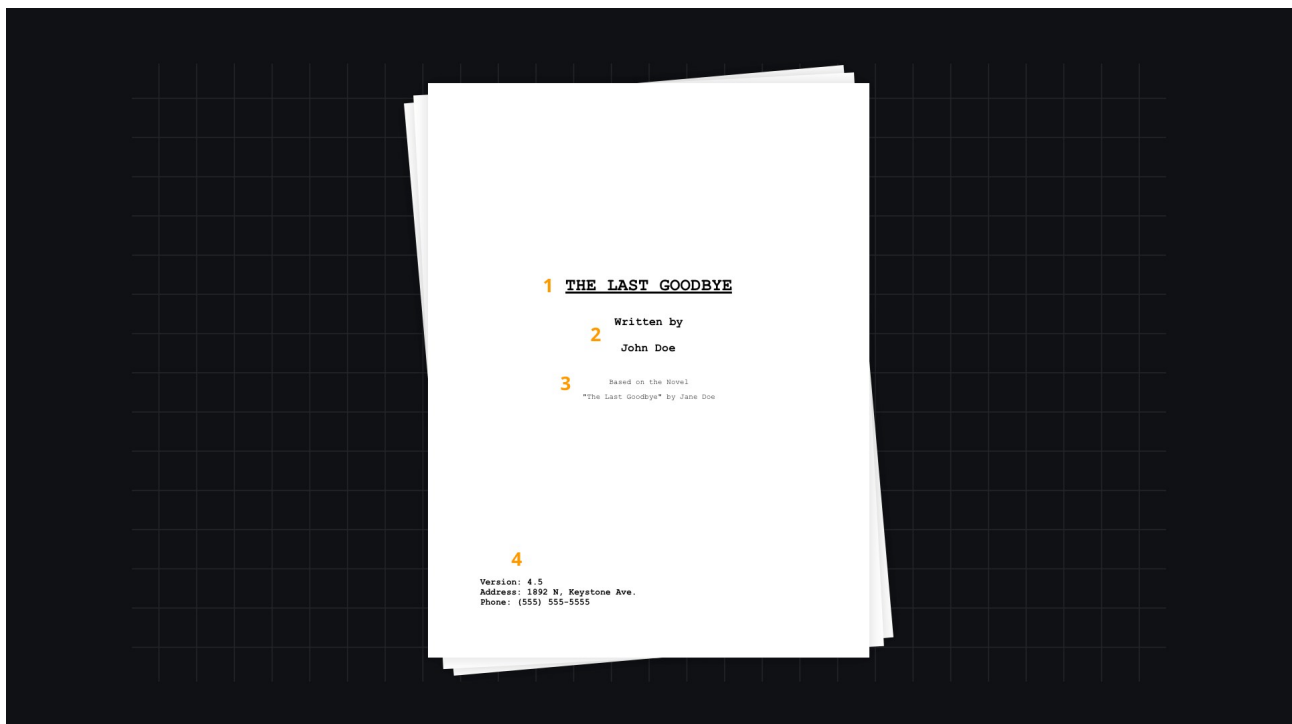
Before diving into formatting and structure, your screenplay needs a proper title page. While it may seem like a minor detail, it's the first impression your script makes. A professional title page shows you understand industry standards and makes your work look polished.

Here's what should be included on a screenplay title page:

Screenplay Title Page Format

1. **Title** – Centered, bold, and written in ALL CAPS.
2. **Written by** – Centered beneath the title, usually formatted as: Written by [Your Name]
3. **Based on (if applicable)** – If your screenplay is adapted from another work, include: Based on the novel "[Book Title]" by [Author's Name]
4. **Contact Information** – Your email or representation's contact info, is typically placed in the bottom left corner.

Example of a Proper Screenplay Title Page:



How to write a screenplay: Title Page

Additional Tips:

- **Avoid unnecessary personal information** – Unlike in the past, you don't need to include your home address. A designated email for your screenwriting work is sufficient.
- **Use standard formatting** – The title page should be clean and simple. No images, no fancy fonts—just professional and easy to read.
- **Keep it to one page** – The title page should never exceed a single sheet.

A well-formatted title page sets the tone for your script. It's a small but essential step that ensures your screenplay looks professional from the very first glance.

Other important screenwriting notes

Some nuanced screenwriting practices may seem correct but can confuse or hinder the physical production. Thorough pre production planning ensures a smoother transition from script to screen, saving time and resources.

Does this sound familiar? You understand script formatting, but after reading popular scripts, you're more confused. Many screenwriters bend the rules, using format creatively to enhance pace and flow.

"Why follow strict rules when top writers don't?" You might be asking, how do you format a script when even professionals bend the rules?

Good question. Most scripts you read are early drafts or spec scripts, not production-ready versions. If you want your script to be production-friendly, it's best to write with that in mind.

Screenplay Format Mastery

Ultimate Writers Guide

<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/brilliant-script-screenplay-format/>

By StudioBinder

Alright — you've got it. The screenplay idea that will change the world, break box office records, and win you every single Oscar. Only... you don't quite understand how to format a screenplay. Do you even really need screenplay format?

Our answer? A resounding "**Yes!**" Screenplay format is necessary if you want anyone to take your magnum opus seriously, but more importantly? It's necessary if you want your script to become an actual finished film.

Formatting Is King

It's not just stylistic and the "rules" are not arbitrary. Industry standard screenplay format has many functions and benefits in the filmmaking process. Perhaps most importantly, a draft in proper screenwriting format denotes professionalism, otherwise it appears amateurish and would likely get tossed before the end of page

What is a Script?

A movie script or screenplay is the blueprint for any feature film, TV show or video game. Scripts includes characters actions, dialogue and movement as well as stage direction. Movie script format has a unique set of industry standard rules, which are slightly different than the script writing format used in a shooting script. A shooting script is a more precisely formatted version of the script, used in Pre-Production and Production to turn the screenplay into a film. This version can include elements like camera directions, music cues or transitions.

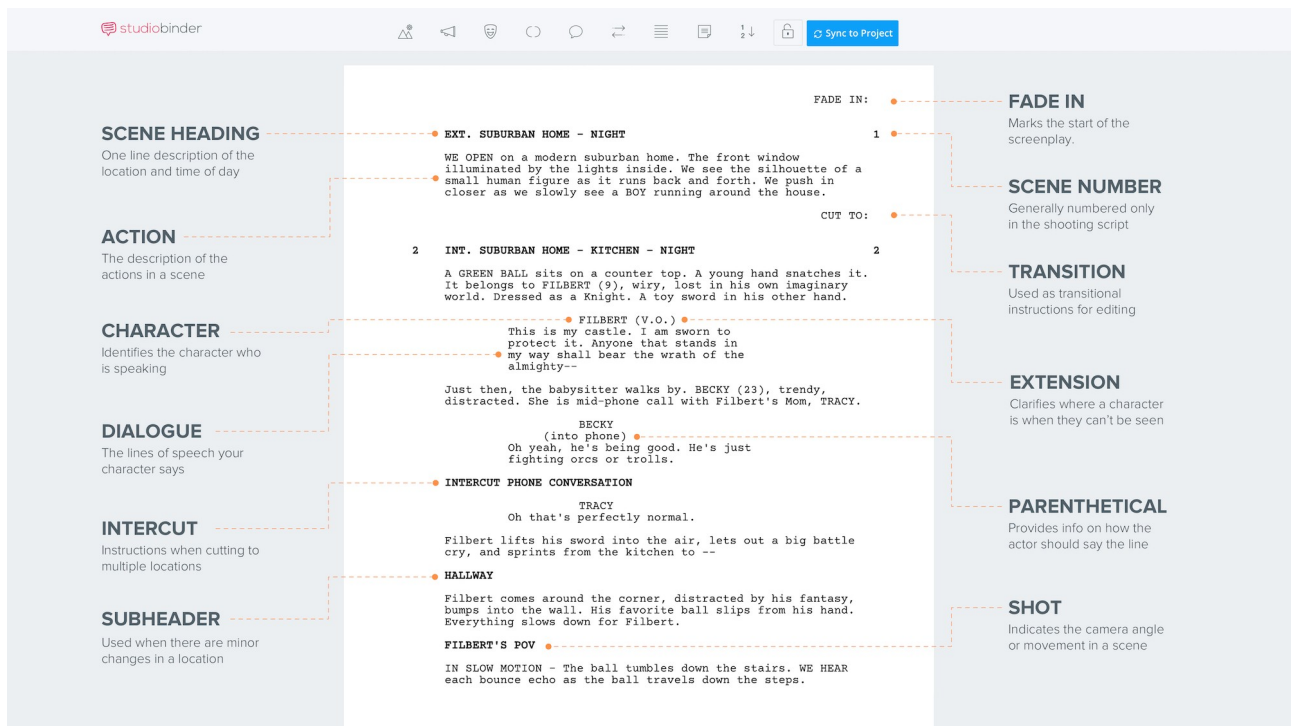
Script Writing Format:

- Screenplays are typically 90-110 pages in length
- Format helps determine run time, schedule & budget

Proper film script format also plays a large part in the script breakdown process, one of the most important steps in turning a screenplay into an actual film. Film budget planning and crafting a shooting schedule are both informed by screenwriting format.

Anatomy of a Screenplay

In this screenplay template, you can see all the major screenplay elements and their positioning on the page.



Screenplay Template & Sample Script Format

Rather than replicate these movie script format rules manually, most writers choose a dedicated script writing software like StudioBinder. This removes all the guesswork and lets the writer focus on what's most important — the story you're trying to tell.

Proper screenplay format will make this process immensely easier. Using these elements correctly is essential to proper script writing format. This is true for everything from short film scripts to million-dollar blockbusters.

Formatting is also essential when entering some of the best screenwriting contests. The Academy's Nicholl Fellowships, for example, is perhaps the biggest contest and they have a fantastic resource guide for script formatting.

For more research to see how professional screenwriters handle screenwriting format, you can read and download over 250+ screenplays in StudioBinder's script library. Now, let's get to specific elements found in screenwriting format.

Screenplay Element	Purpose	Example Format / Notes
Scene Heading (Slugline)	Indicates where and when a scene takes place	INT. COFFEE SHOP – DAY Use INT. for interior, EXT. for exterior
Action / Description	Describes visuals/sound in present tense	Write concisely, focusing on what the audience sees and hears
Character Cue	Identifies who is speaking	CENTER & CAPITALIZE character names above dialogue blocks
Dialogue	Spoken lines of characters	Indented center, with parentheticals sparingly if needed
Extensions (Parentheticals)	Provides delivery context	For example: (V.O.) (O.S.) (V.O.) for voice-over; (O.S.) for offscreen voices
Transitions	Script writing cues for flow	e.g., CUT TO:, FADE IN: - typically capitalized
Subheaders	Helps break up complex or lengthy scenes	Often used for clarity within extended sequences
Montage / Special Sequences	Indicates non-standard scene blocks	Format differently to signal pacing/tone shifts

If you're watching a movie in a theater you can't pause it or rewind it, slow it down or speed it up, so why would you not ensure your script is properly formatted in order for the reader to have that similar experience on the page.

— Gary A. Lowe, Line Producer/UPM

Screenplay Formatting Sluglines

Sluglines (also known as scene headings) tell the reader where the action is happening. It's a location, followed by a time, and looks something like this.

Documents > Scripts > Screenplay Format .. View Only

FADE IN:

1 INT. MORT'S KITCHEN - DAY 1

Mort chops carrots at the counter. Becky leans against the fridge and fiddles with a Rubik's Cube.

MORT
I don't think Dave will say yes.

BECKY
Oh, I think he will.

DAVE (PRE-LAP)
No, absolutely not.

2 EXT. ROCK QUARRY - DAY 2

DAVE, 45, rugged, with an edge, stands on a path in conversation with Mort and Becky.

DAVE (CONT'D)
I don't need you.

With a knowing smile, Becky raises a tattered journal.

Screenplay Example • Sluglines in Sample Script Format

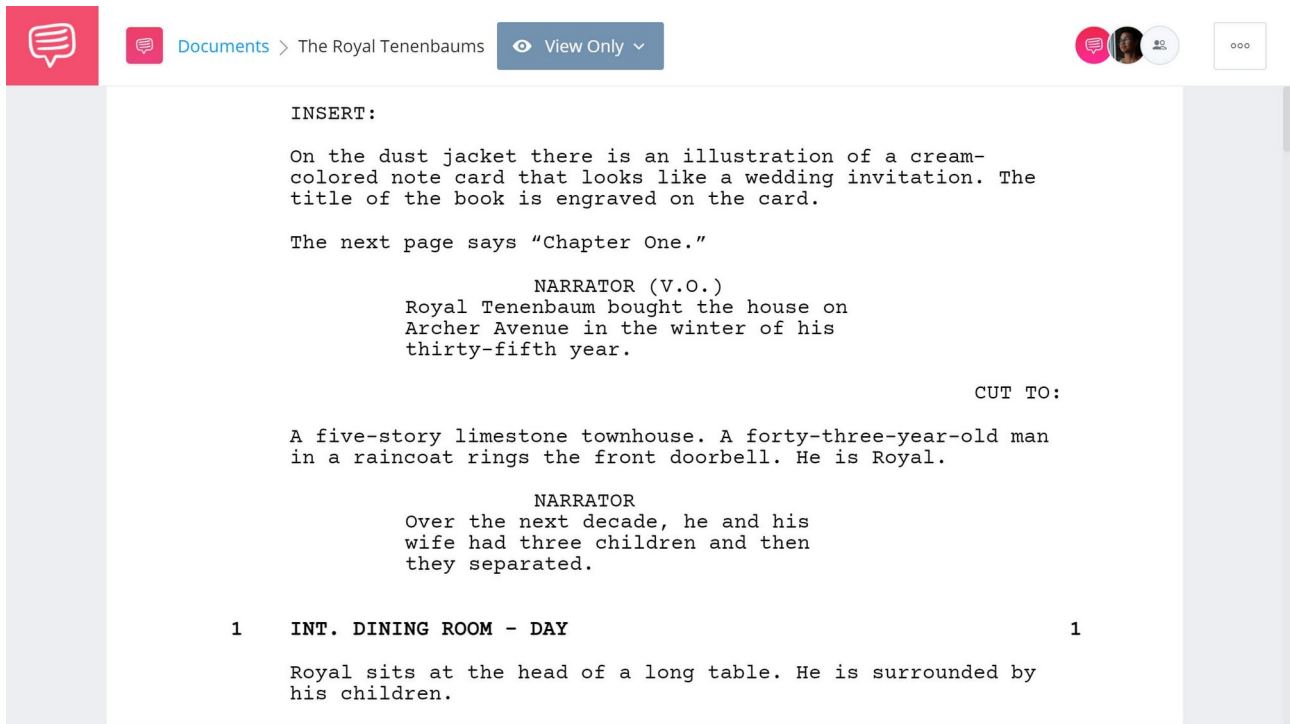
In this screenplay example, you'll see that Scene 1 starts in Mort's Kitchen but what does **INT.** mean in a script? When it comes to slug lines, you first have to establish whether the scene takes place inside (**INT.**) or outside (**EXT.**)

Then add the location of the scene, followed by the time of day (Day, Night, Morning, Evening, etc.). When a scene directly continues from the previous scene, mark it "continuous" in the time slot. If it's a couple minutes later, feel free to use "moments later" in your slugline.

Sometimes you'll have a scene that takes place in both an interior and an exterior. Most of the time, this will be in a moving vehicle of some kind. In those cases, start your slugline with "**INT./EXT.**"

If you're using screenwriting software, it will format it correctly for you, but if you're doing it yourself, be sure to put the entire slugline in ALL CAPS.

Click below to read the full screenplay for *The Royal Tenenbaums* where you can see how sluglines work in a script.



Sluglines are important because they are how your assistant directors and line producers will plan out how things get shot.

The difference between one scene being night and the next being day is important to continuity for hair, makeup, and wardrobe departments.

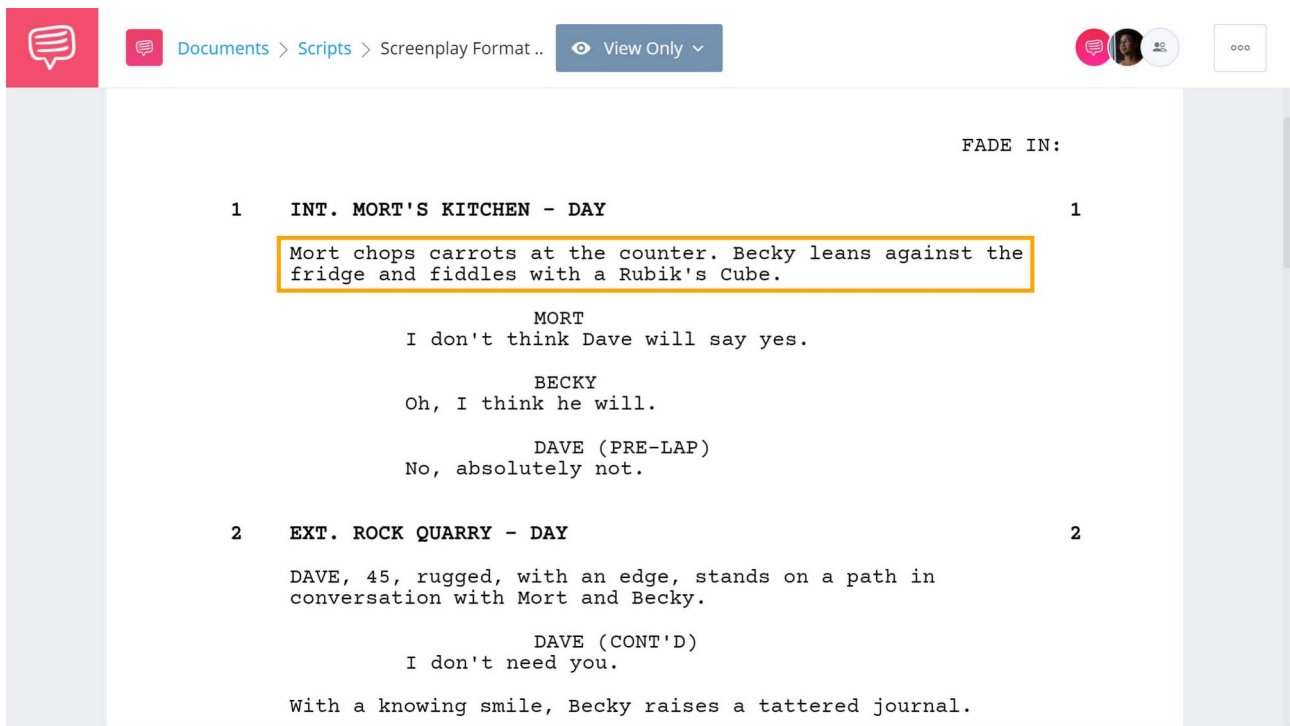
That's why this is one of the most essential screenplay elements in movie script format; it tells you when and where a scene is taking place in the grand scheme of the script. Knowing the time of day and where the scene takes place affects nearly every department in a major way.

Next up, we'll talk about how to write action descriptions in script format.

Action lines

Action description in scripts goes right beneath the slugline. Proper screenplay format dictates that they always be written in the present tense and as visually descriptive as possible.

Here's a script format example of action lines in a screenplay. Note that the actions are written as "just the facts" in a clear and readable way.



Specifically, action lines tell the reader what they will see and hear in the finished film other than dialogue. And don't take the "action" part too literally. This element covers everything, including fight scenes.

When it comes to screenplay format, clarity is king — **remember, a script is a document to be turned into a movie, not really read on its own.**

Department heads will take things literally and, oftentimes, without question. So if you write something ridiculous in the description, they'll take it upon themselves to figure out how to make it real — that's their job.

Make sure you're deliberate and precise with your action lines. Find the balance between letting a director direct a scene, and giving the Propmaster enough information to get exactly what you want.

This is especially true if you're trying something as chaotic as writing a fight scene or writing a car chase, where every detail has to be planned out. The more complicated the production, the more important it is for you to follow proper script format. This type of work is why screenwriting format was developed the way it was.

Did You Know?

According to industry analyst Stephen Follows, after conducting an analysis of 12,000+ screenplays, the average length for features is 106 pages?

There are two hard and fast rules for capitalization in screenplay format. Always capitalize a character's name the first time they appear in the action/description, and always capitalize screenplay transitions.

Beyond that, you can also capitalize **important props, sound design, and camera movements**. Anything you want to use the movie script format to call out things important enough to merit the attention of those doing the script breakdown.

Just don't go overboard with it. There's nothing more annoying and CONFUSING then when someone RANDOMLY capitalizes EVERYTHING ON THE page.

Formatting script elements

Character Cues

After the action/description, when a character speaks, we start with their name (otherwise known as a character cue). You center and capitalize a character ID and put dialogue underneath. Your character ID need not be your entire character's name. It could be a first name, a last name, or an alias.

Whatever best identifies the character as that character. And stay consistent — if a character is identified as "McCloud," he stays McCloud, even if we eventually learn that his first name is "Jack."

The only exception to this rule is if your character goes in disguise, especially if they fake a voice whilst disguised.

For example, in the script, this person would be "Bruce Wayne."



While this person would be "Batman."



Even though they're technically the same person in a different costume.

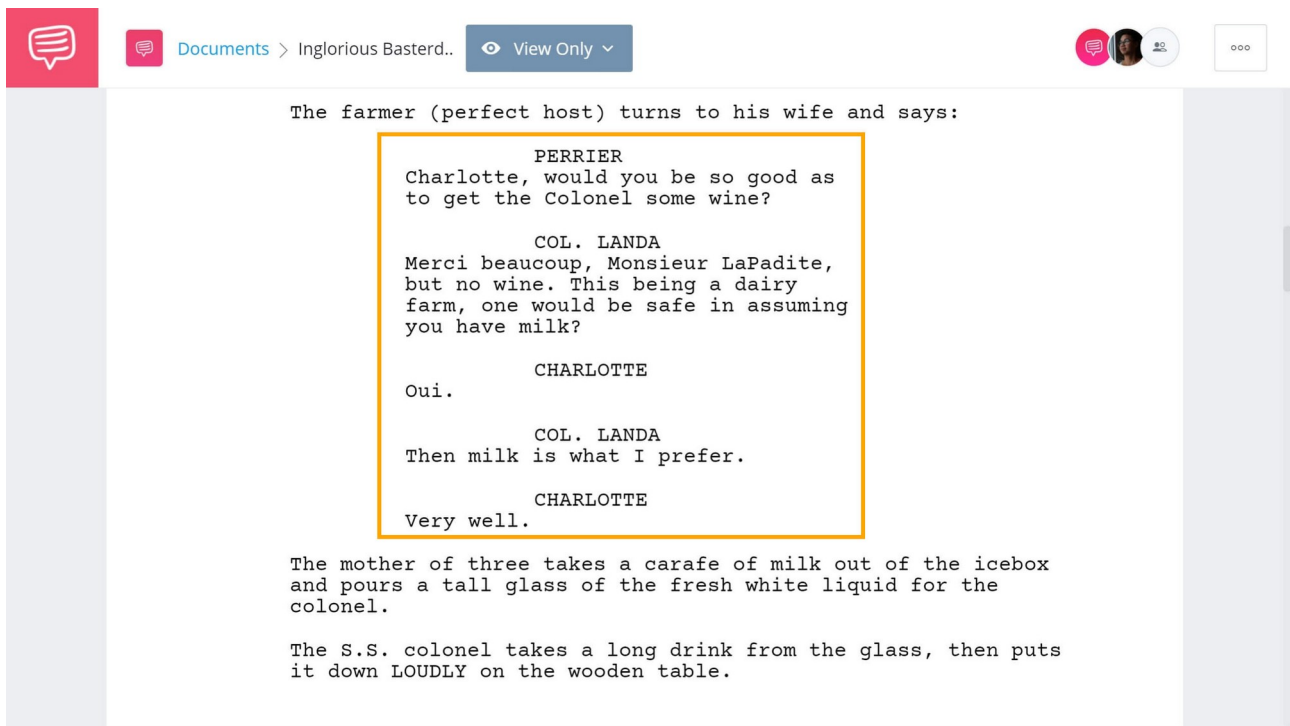
If you find that to be too confusing, another method is to use a slash. "Bruce Wayne" becomes "Bruce Wayne/Batman" whenever he's Batman, and just regular Bruce when he's not.

Dialogue

Dialogue formatting is pretty straight-forward. Writing good dialogue is a topic all its own.

Here's how dialogue looks in actual screenplay format. The margins on either side of the dialogue keep it restricted to the middle of the page. This allows for extra white space on the page for notes.

Notice the sample screenplay below from *Inglourious Basterds* to see how to format dialogue in a script.



When writing dialogue, the idea is to let the characters speak for themselves. Always front and center, of course, is the reality that you, the writer, are shaping those characters.

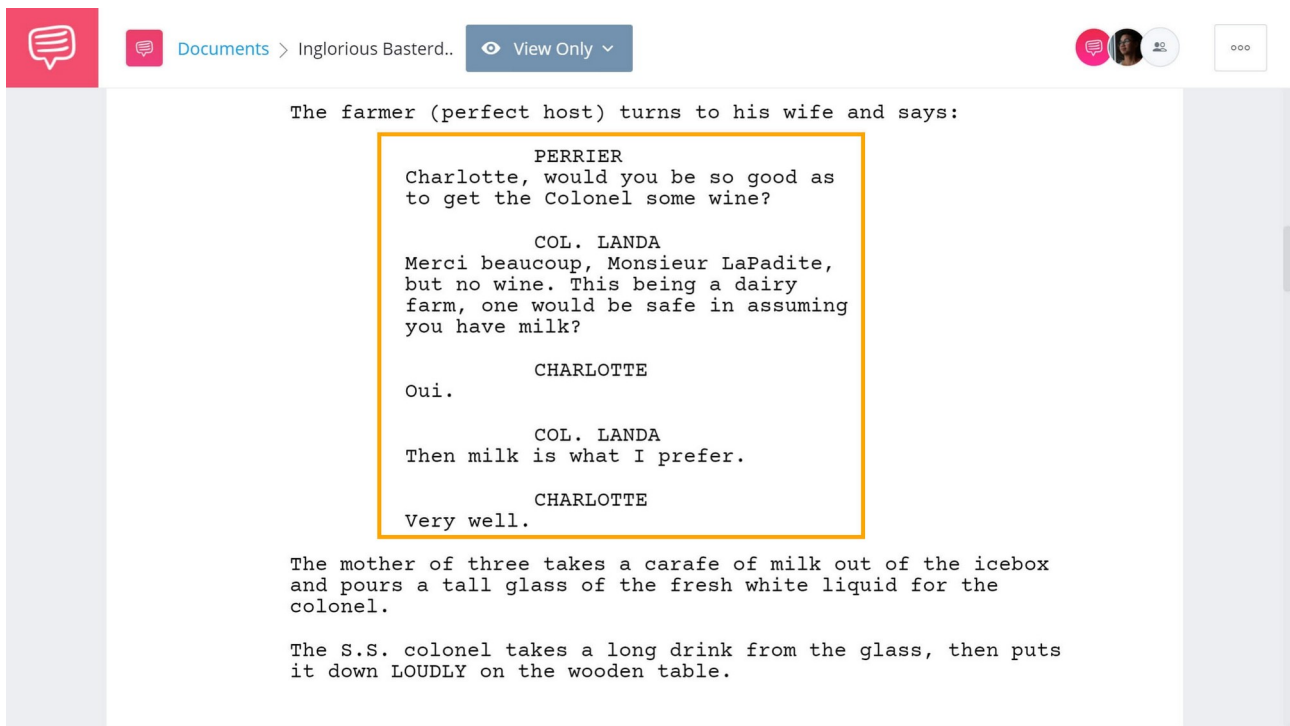
Therefore, by using software that takes care of screenplay formatting automatically, you can give your attention to the characters and their lines.

Extensions

Extensions go next to a character name in parentheses and tell us how the dialogue is heard by the audience. Most screenwriting software will provide the standard screenplay format extensions once you start typing the parenthetical.

CONTINUED (CONT'D)

You'll also occasionally use **(CONT'D)** next to the character's name to indicate the continuation of their lines after they're "interrupted" by some action description. Consider this moment from *The Royal Tenenbaums*, one of Wes Anderson's best movies. In this scene, Royal's dialogue is broken up by Etheline's action so we apply a **(CONT'D)** extension next to his name.



VOICE OVER (V.O.)

Voice over is when a character is speaking over the action, but isn't heard by the other characters in the scene. Usually narration, but can also be a character's internal dialogue. Learn more about how to write voice over in a montage using proper screenplay format.

OFF SCREEN (O.S.)

When a character is speaking and is heard by other characters, but can't be seen by the audience or other characters. Just write **(O.S.)** next to the character's name. "Off camera" written as **(O.C.)** is also acceptable. Examples of extensions include:

- Someone making an announcement over a loud speaker
- A character making a dramatic surprise entrance
- A disembodied ghostly voice

INTO DEVICES

Fairly self-explanatory: characters speaking into their phones or radios, rather than to each other in person. This is most useful when characters are speaking to someone on the phone and someone right next to them. Or when using a local news station to lay out the story's exposition.

PRE LAP

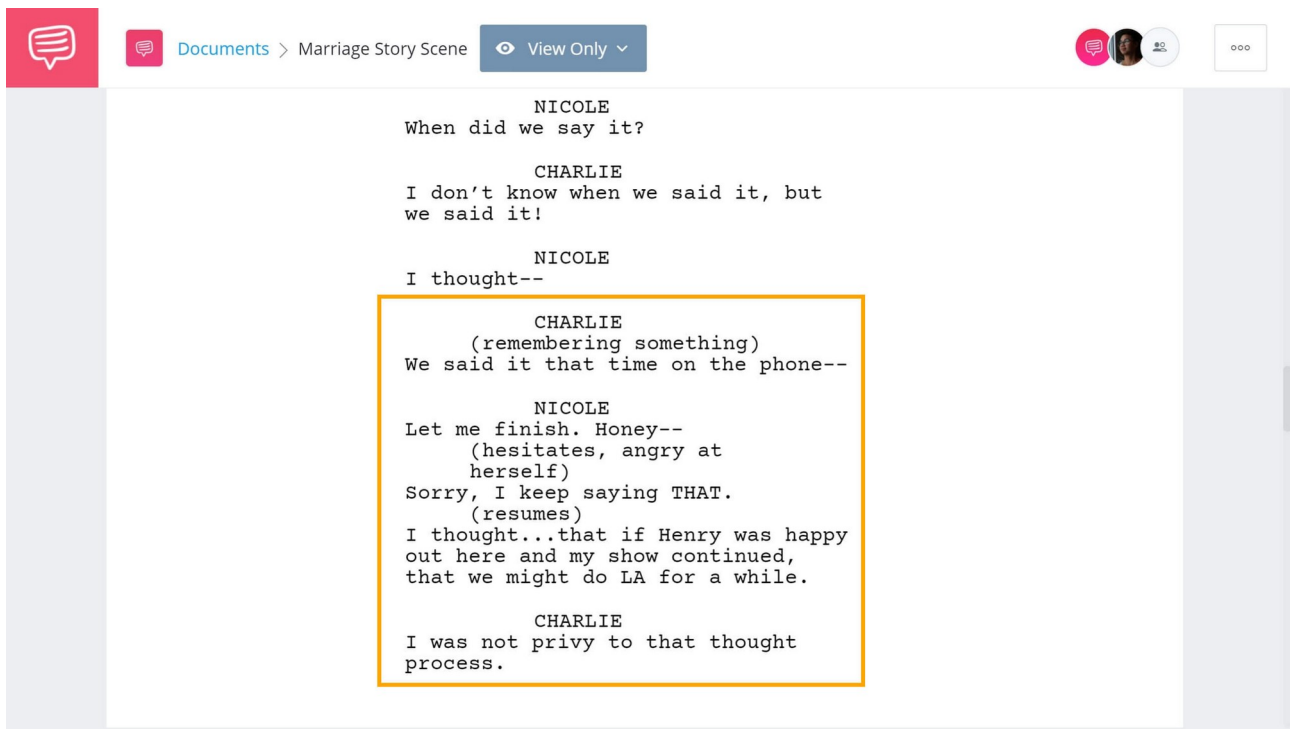
Pre lap is dialogue from the next scene that starts before the current scene has ended. Simply write "pre lap" in the parentheses next to the character's name.

Formatting a script for Performance - Parentheticals

Parentheticals in screenplays can seem like extensions at first glance, but there are a few key distinctions. Screenplay extensions are technical directions — they explain where the person saying the dialogue is in the scene.

Parentheticals are directions to the actor — they detail how the line should be performed.

Here's an example of a parenthetical in proper screenplay format. This is an absolutely crushing scene in *Marriage Story*.



Notice how writer/director Noah Baumbach uses parentheticals to map out the internal conflict for his characters. Make sure you read the entire scene to see how Baumbach uses the combination of dialogue and parentheticals to craft a multi-layered and emotionally dynamic scene.

As far as screenplay format goes, parentheticals are placed directly beneath the character ID in (parentheses). Some examples include:

- AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE
- PAINFULLY
- TEARFULLY
- WHISPERING
- LAUGHING

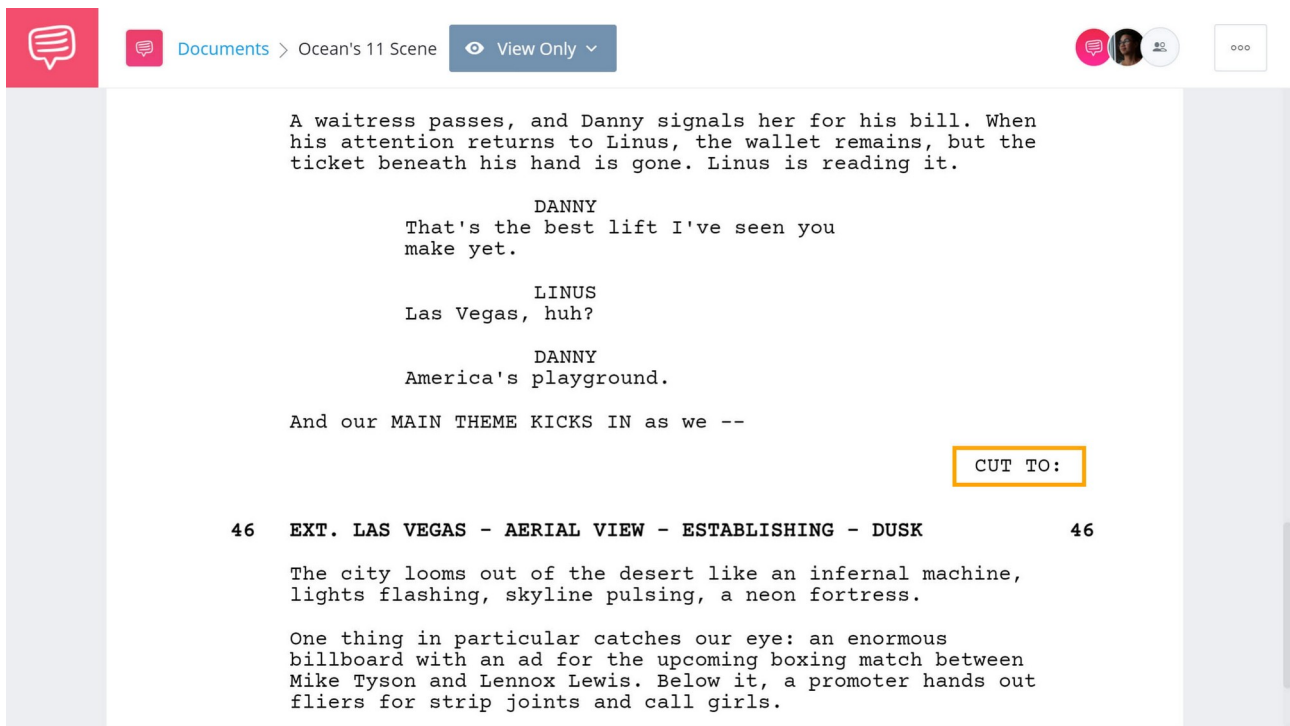
Parentheticals can also include actions for the actors to perform while speaking. This is especially common when writing for television, where page space is at a premium.

- SHRUGGING
- STRETCHING
- DRAWING HIS WEAPON
- FALLING TO HER KNEES

If you're using screenwriting software, it's important to change elements when writing parentheticals. You can't just write them into parentheses and hope it reads correctly!

Screenplay transitions

Screenplay transitions indicate how an editor should switch between two scenes — they're on the far right of the page (right justified) and placed between two scenes. Proper screenplay formatting conventions usually indicate these as being capitalized.



So, rather than mark everything with a **"CUT TO:"** use screenplay transitions **ONLY** when you want it to stand out in some way. For example, in this moment from *Ocean's Eleven*, writer Ted Griffin uses this transition to emphasize the switch of location to Las Vegas.

Pay attention to how the dialogue and description build momentum going into the next scene, which is punctuated by the **"CUT TO:"** transition, and concluded with a vibrant description of Sin City.

Knowing how to use screenplay transitions is a major part in knowing how to format a screenplay.

The **"CUT TO:"** is also widely used when formatting multi-cam television scripts as it marks the end of a scene. Because multi-cam scripts are formatted with page breaks for both scenes and acts, it's important to mark the ending of the scene versus when it's an act break, which is also a commercial break.

Much like with parentheticals, your screenwriting software will likely have the other standard screenplay transitions preloaded for you.

These include, but are not limited to:

- **SMASH TO:**
This is a really abrupt cut, like a **"CUT TO:"** times ten. The kind of cut that comes in mid-sentence. Smash cuts are used here to as a form of montage (which we'll get into later).
- **DISSOLVE TO:**
When one scene "dissolves" into another scene, almost transforming into that scene. This is primarily used to indicate that time has passed.
- **MATCH CUT TO:**
A tricky form of edit — where you cut the film so the last shot in the previous scene (say, a hand reaching for a knife) matches the first shot in the new scene (a hand reaching for an apple). Here are some example of how and when match cuts are used in film to give you an idea of how they might be written.
- **INTERCUT:**
Intercutting (or cross-cutting) is where you bounce back and forth between two different scenes. It's usually used for phone calls, but not always. Learn more about how to write telephone conversations in a script. And watch this video for in-depth guide on how to intercut scenes in your screenplay.

Subheaders

Subheaders are like mini-sluglines that indicate another place or time within a scene. They're even formatted like sluglines — left-justified and capitalized. Take a look at this example to get an idea of what we mean:

SOMEWHERE IN THE SEWER SYSTEM - NIGHT

A soaked and exhausted Remy has pulled his battered cookbook to the sewer bank. It's dark and cold, it smells bad, but he's safe. Maybe the clan will find him. He waits.

LATER

The COOKBOOK has dried out a bit, and there is just enough light seeping through a grate above for Remy to read it.

If you're using screenwriting software, you'll probably have to format it as a "scene header" — that's perfectly fine!

If you're shooting within a large house, a subheader might be used to indicate a change in rooms. From the creepy FOYER to the haunted LIBRARY, for example. Or to indicate a detail of a certain location.

Or you might want to use a subheader to indicate a jump in time. If a cop is on a long stakeout and you want to show that time has passed, you'd throw it under the subheader **LATER**.

This is one of the gray areas in screenplay format where some (mostly those in production) say it should be slugged as a new scene (since it's a different time and may require a different setup).

Writers, on the other hand, tend to prefer to save the line so they don't push a page. So instead of saying **INT. CAR - LATER**, which requires more space, they'd just say **LATER** and continue the scene since it never changed locations. Either way is proper script formatting, but using subheaders is more casual.

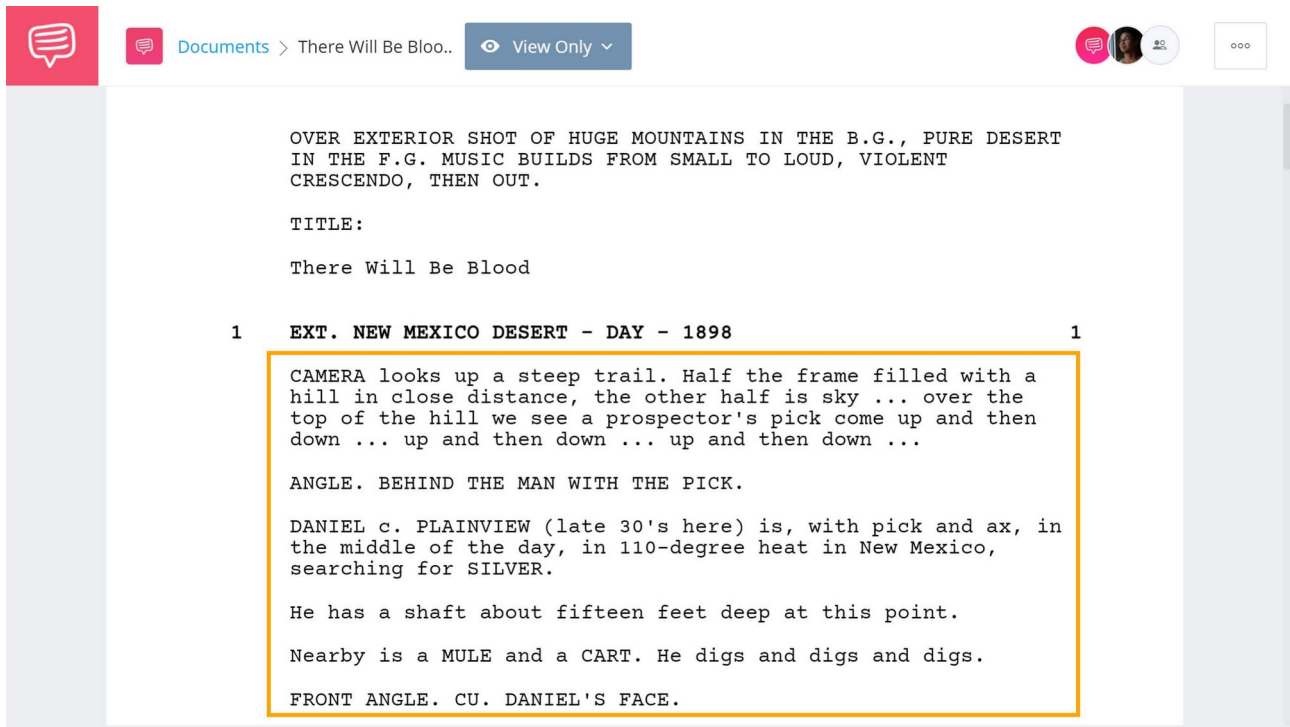
Shots and Camera Directions

Formatted like a caps-locked action line, shots direct our attention to a specific visual or way of seeing something. This can include various camera shots, camera angles or camera movements.

In modern times, they're typically used by writer-directors, but also when the writer feels that a visual is key to the entire scene and wants to be sure the director knows it.

Here's a screenplay example from *There Will Be Blood*, where P.T. Anderson (who will also eventually direct the film) writes multiple shots and angles throughout. **Again, unless you're directing the film, it's best to leave these decisions out of your script.**

For this script example, we've included the entire opening sequence so you can see for yourself how Anderson tells us everything we need to know about this character without a word of dialogue.

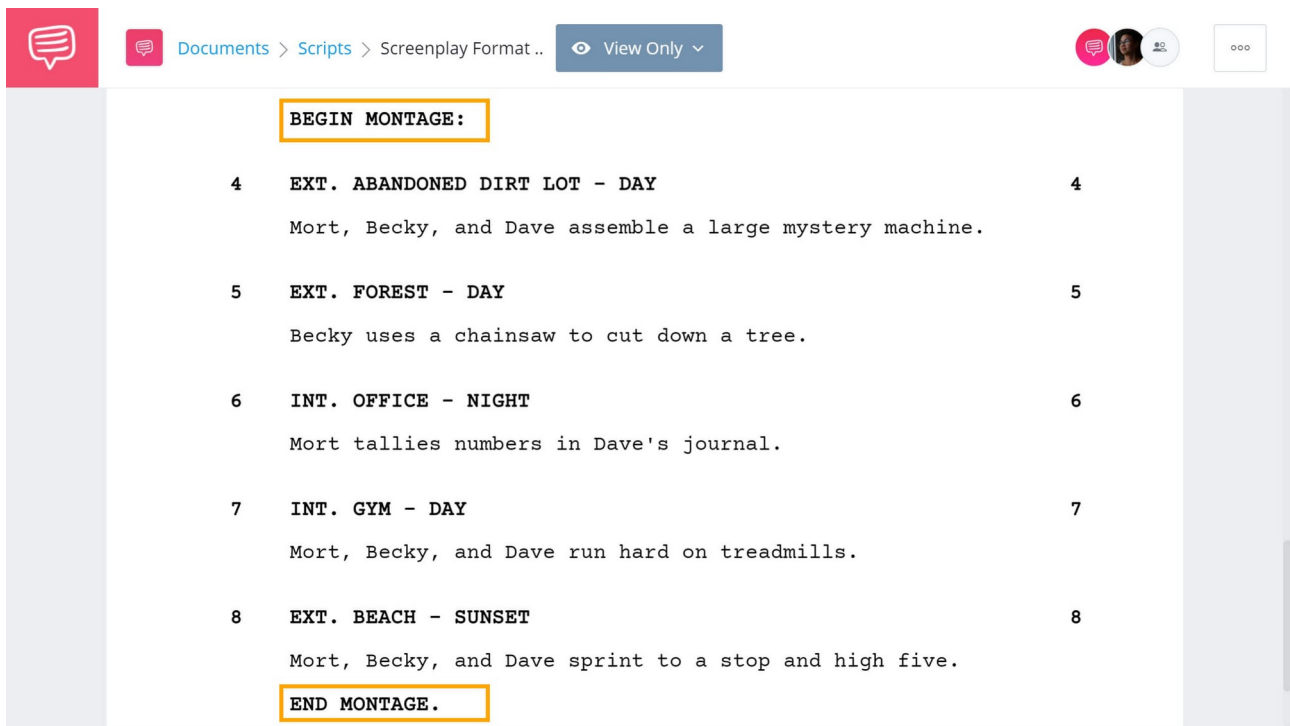


Most screenwriters today only specify shots when it's absolutely critical to the interpretation of the scene. By indicating various shot types in a script, keep in mind that you as a writer are also hammering home to the reader that this is a movie and cameras will be recording it. On a certain level, this can take the reader out of the story, so you might want to use the technique sparingly.

Montage

To start a montage, training or otherwise, write “**Begin Montage**” as if it were a subheader. Then list out your scenes as you normally would.

Once the montage is over and Rocky finally ran up all those steps, close off your montage with “**End Montage**,” again written as if it were a subheader.



There is some leeway when writing a montage. For example, writers often prefer to simply list individual lines, or lines set off by hyphens, within the action to indicate different montage locations and sub-scenes.

Just know that if you want to format your script for production, you'll need a slugline for each individual shot or scene within a montage (as in the montage example above). That's because each location means a different setup and a whole separate set of production concerns. And if you hope to catch the attention of a production company with your script, using important identifiers like this will only help.

Music and Lyrics

Lyrics are tricky when it comes to how to format a screenplay, particularly when they have to be matched to action on the screen. No screenwriting software has a "lyrics" element.

An important rule of thumb when learning how to write a screenplay is that, when done properly, one page of film script equals roughly one minute of screen time. Emphasis on roughly.

Since lyrics take up a lot of page space, but don't take as much time to sing, that can throw the balance off.

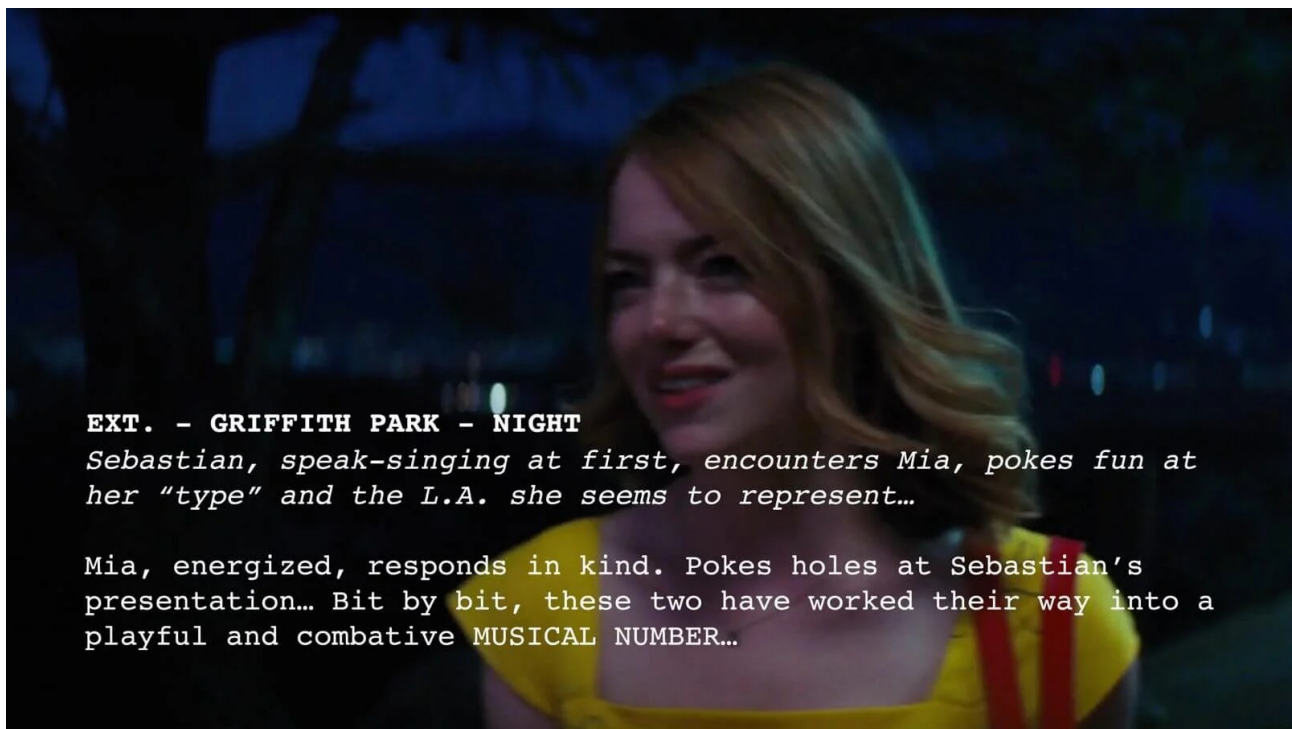
You have two options for solving this problem.

SPACE IT OUT

You can spread out the lyrics on the page with shots and action directions. This will let you design a little of the choreography and help establish the rhythm and pacing of your big musical number.

DESCRIBE THE SEQUENCE

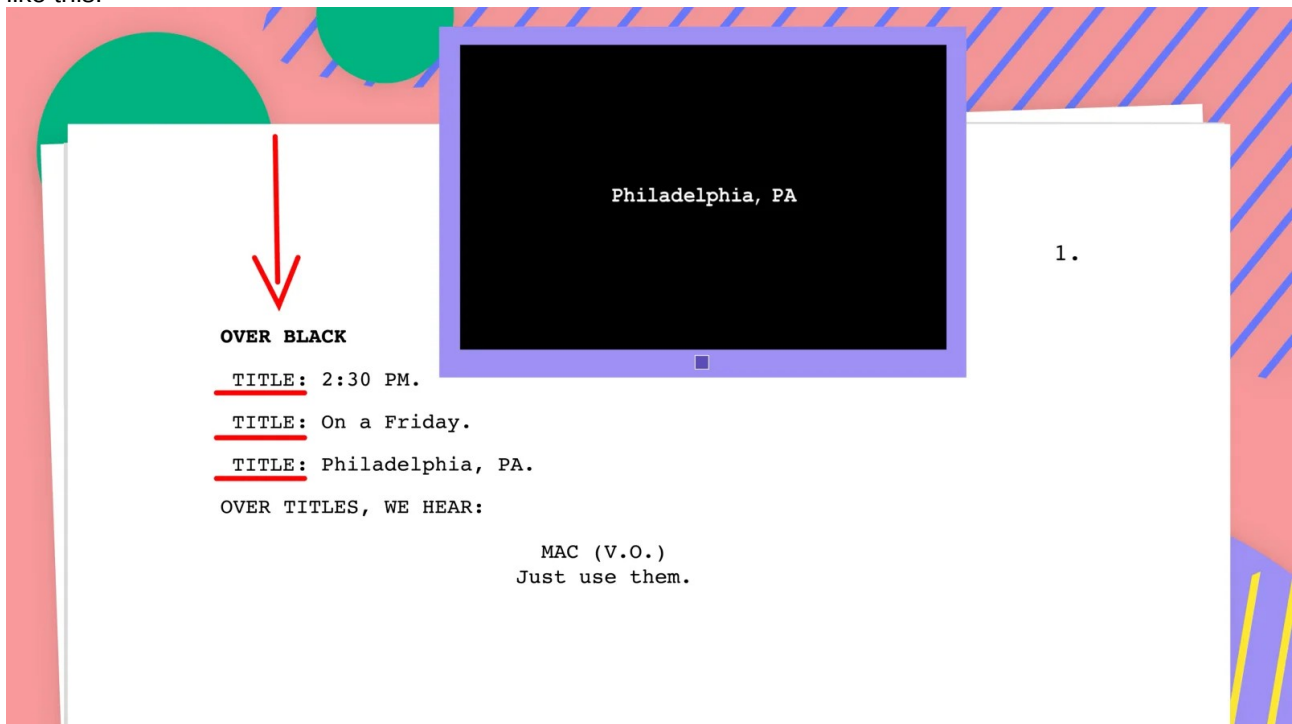
Rather than list out each individual lyric, describe the general feel of the song and the sequence that accompanies it. This is how writer/director Damien Chazelle wrote the musical sequences in his script for *La La Land*.



While leaving the actual lyrics out of the script, it saves space but just remember to account for the scheduling later. The "musical number" described here might take a lot of time to shoot, more than this simple mention suggests.

Chyrons

Chyrons are the text that appears over the screen — usually used to indicate the time and place of the scene to the audience. You'll see this sort of thing a lot in some of the best war movie scripts or spy thrillers. Start an action line with the word "**CHYRON**" (yes, in all caps) followed by the text of the chyron. Some writers like to use "**TITLE**" instead of "**CHYRON**." It's a personal choice. If you were using Title, it would look like this:



Other than the scene heading, this is another opportunity to describe the setting of the story or any additional information or context for the reader.

Using "Chyron" would look exactly the same, only swapping the word "Chyron" for "Title." Either one is also considered proper screenplay format.

Script Formats in Different Mediums

As we've seen, screenplay format for film is very specific. And if you were hoping that once you learned all of this, it would apply to TV, theatre, radio, video games, etc, we have some bad news for you. It's all slightly different.

Though they're mostly similar, TV script formatting is a little different. And within the umbrella of TV, it breaks down even further. For a very helpful guide on how all of these formats should be handled, check out the [BBC's Medium and Format guide](#).

One of the main differences between TV and film script format is "act breaks."

Whenever you reach the end of an act (or teaser) where the show would cut to commercial break, note it by putting "**End of Act One**," (or Two or Three) centered and underlined, into your script.

Then you skip a page and put "Act One" (or Act Two or Three) at the very top — again, centered and underlined.

If you're using screenwriting software, it's very important that you open your template as a "one hour" or "half hour" drama. If you open it as a feature film script, the screenwriting software may not include that element.

Also, keep in mind that a single-cam sitcom and a multi-cam sitcom have a very different script format.

Category	Single-Camera TV Script	Multi-Camera TV Script
Common Genres	Drama, dramedy, serialized comedy (e.g., <i>Breaking Bad</i> , <i>The Bear</i>)	Sitcoms, traditional studio comedies (e.g., <i>Friends</i> , <i>The Big Bang Theory</i>)
Production Style	Shot like a film, one camera setup per shot	Shot on a stage with multiple cameras simultaneously
Episode Page Length	Typically 30-60 pages, depending on runtime	Often 40-55 pages for a 22-minute episode due to denser dialogue
Formatting Layout	Similar to film format: single column	Double-column format: dialogue on the left, camera/technical notes on the right
Camera Directions	Rarely included in spec scripts	Frequently included (e.g., CLOSE ON, WIDE SHOT)
Scene Headings	Standard INT./EXT. Sluglines	Often simplified; locations may be reused frequently
Dialogue Style	More naturalistic and cinematic	Faster-paced, joke-dense, often with built-in audience timing
Action Description	Visual, descriptive, minimal	Functional and brief, supporting performance timing
Audience Consideration	No live audience	Often written for a live studio audience or laugh track
Spec Script Expectations	Avoid camera directions; focus on story and tone	Specs usually still written in single-camera format, even for multi-cam shows

The single-cam is, essentially, a movie script with act breaks. While the multi-cam has double-spaced dialogued, capitalized action lines, and the new acts begin halfway down the page, and each new scene starts on a new page.

Make sure you know which one you're writing and then write to that screenplay format. These two types of comedies have quite different tones, aesthetics, and productions. It's critical that the reader, and even more so the production crew, know which one you've written.