

SCRIPT FORMAT

It is very important to use the correct formatting for your screenplay. Not only does this make your screenplay look professional but it also allows the reader to time it – with standard formatting, one page equals roughly one-minute screen time.

Software

The easiest way to ensure correct formatting is to use a screenwriting software programme which does it for you, such as Movie Magic or Final Draft. You can download Script Smart, a free page template for use in Microsoft Word, from www.bbc.writersroom.org.uk. Failing that, you can use any word processor, setting the margins and tabs yourself. Variations abound but here is a useable guide.

Page Layout

In the UK, use A4 page layout with the margins set at 1 1/2 inches left, 1 inch right, top, and bottom. Always use 12 point Courier typeface. Number pages on the top right hand corner but do not number the scenes.

Setting

Each scene will have a heading or slug line, written in capitals, 1 1/2 inches from the left. INT./EXT. is used to designate indoors or outdoors, followed by the location and whether it is day or night e.g. INT.BATHROOM – DAY.

Scene

Next is the scene description, denoting what the setting is, who the characters are, and what action is going on in the scene. This is double-spaced below the slug line, 1 1/2 inches left. The lines of the scene description should be single-spaced, with ragged rather than justified text and no more than seven and a half inches from the left. The first time a character appears, put their name in capitals. Break up the scene description into paragraphs of a maximum of four lines at a time – this makes it easier to read.

Character

The character's cue should also be in capitals, 3 1/2 inches from the left. With a single return under this, will be the dialogue.

Dialogue

Each line of dialogue should be 2 1/2 inches from the left and no more than 3 1/2 inches long. Do not hyphenate long words and do not break a sentence from one page to the next. When a character's dialogue goes over the page, write (MORE) next to the character cue and, on the following page, repeat the character cue with (CONT'D) next to it. Double space from the dialogue to the next element – be it another character's cue, action or new scene heading.

Parentheticals

Just beneath the character's name may be a parenthetical direction 3 inches from the left. These are known as "wrylys" or "actors instructions" and denote how the line is to be delivered e.g. 'happily', 'cynically' etc. Do not overuse these – the actors will bring their own interpretation to the script. Parentheticals can also be used for minor bits of direction, such as 'removing his glasses.' Immediately below this is the will be the dialogue.

Action

If there is a line of action within the scene, for example, "George punches him in the face", this is the same paragraph format as the scene description.

Transitions

Transitions between scenes such as CUT TO: indicating a sharp cut, or DISSOLVE TO: indicating the passage of time, are written in capitals 5 1/2 inches from the left. You do not need to use transitions, however, as this is implied by the movement from one scene to another.

Direction

Lastly, resist the temptation to write camera angles – that is the director's job and slows down the reading of the script.

The best way to understand all the finer nuances of script format is to buy published screenplays; make sure they are in film rather than theatre format. You can also download properly formatted scripts from the Internet. There are many good books on the topic; *The Screenwriter's Bible* by David Trottier has a very thorough section on formatting.