

PEOPLE'S HOLLYWOOD

PROPER SCRIPT FORMAT

A script (or screenplay) is formatted in a particular way so as to give information to those who will make the film. A screenplay that is turned into a film goes through three stages as:

- 1) **Proposal** to recruit collaborators and raise money for the film project
- 2) **Blueprint** (shooting script which includes shot breakdown)
- 3) **Record for post production** (Script is updated to include all changes made during shooting and editing, which usually doesn't happen)

FREE SCRIPTWRITING SOFTWARE

Here is some of the [Free Scriptwriting Software](#) you can download that will format your script according to the rules outlined below. Not on the list is [Celtx.com](#), which has a commonly used free version they don't advertise. You have to sign-in with an email and password to create an account and then go to the Pricing page and scroll to the very bottom, where in small print they give you the free account option.

We are not recommending particular software, but here is an easy to understand video on the basics of using software [Celtx and the Basics of Script](#). *(Note: Celtx has since revamped their design, simplifying the look, which makes it more difficult for beginners, but you can visit their help center for starter videos.)*

Plan to have one session where you just check out different software versions. Check [YouTube](#) to see if they have videos on how to get started. If you don't have experience setting up software, ask someone who uses online resources a lot to help you get started. Once you know how to sign-in to the software, using it is actually easy. You choose what you want to type – i.e. SCENE HEADING, ACTION, DIALOGUE, etc. – and then you type and the software does the technical formatting for you.

Writers who have never been filmmakers and start working on software that formats the script for them, often don't understand why it's formatted as it is. Be smarter. Understand the why. Be a Writer who thinks like a Filmmaker.

BASIC SCRIPT FORMAT RULES

The script should be copied on 8 ½ by 11 inch, white, paper (which gets 3 holes punched after printing). For a cover use a blank, plain color, 8 ½ by 11 inch card stock cover (you can also use regular paper). Bind the script with brass fasteners or a two-piece fastener, so that the script can be easily taken apart.

The screenplay's cover page includes the name of the script, your name and contact information, and copyright information. Do not include drawings, a synopsis, or a listing of characters.

When a screenplay is properly formatted one script page will equal approximately one minute of screen time. A ninety page script will make roughly a 90 minute film. On the average, a feature script should not be more than 130 pages; 90 to 115 pages is considered best (because obviously a longer script means a longer movie and that equals a bigger budget).

The industry standard for font is Courier 12pt.. There are exact margins for laying out the page. The text starts 1 inch from the top of the page and ends 1 inch from the bottom. Page numbers are written ½ inch from the top of the paper and 1 inch from the right-hand edge.

RULE FOR SCENE CHANGE

A script is composed of units called 'scenes'. How do you know when a scene should change into a new scene? The rule: **A SCENE HAPPENS IN CONTINUOUS TIME IN ONE LOCATION.** Even stepping from the dining room into the hallway is a change of location.

SCENE COMPONENTS

A scene has three component parts:

1. Scene Heading Line (sometimes called Slug Line)
2. Narration (Action)
3. Dialogue

These component parts are illustrated below using excerpts from a student's scene, 'MY FAMILIA' by Christopher McClain.

SCENE HEADING LINE

- 1) Scene Heading Line consists of:
 - a) Placement of the camera (EXT. for Exterior and INT. for Interior)
 - b) Location of the scene
 - c) Time of day (day or night)

It is one line written in all capital letters. It starts flush to the left margin, which is indented 1 ½ inches from the left edge of the paper. Example:

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

NARRATION /ACTION PARAGRAPHS

- 2) Narration or Action paragraphs provide descriptive information about the characters, their actions, and the locations that they inhabit. Description is written flush to the left margin, which is indented 1 ½ inches from the left edge of the paper and runs across the page up to 1 inch from the right. It is always written in the present tense (Even when you write a scene that is supposed to be happening in the past, you still write in present tense.) Keep sentences and paragraphs brief. Example:

RING! RING! The telephone bellows underneath a disarrayed stack of old newspapers and clutter.

MAMA, a determined-looking woman in her mid-60's is at the dining table icing a cake. There are many dishes of food on the table.

When a character is first introduced in the description his/her name is written in all capital letters. Example: MAMA. Thereafter, when the character's name is mentioned again in description it is written normally with only the first letter capitalized: Mama. This makes it easy when flipping through a script to quickly notice when a new character is being introduced.

DIALOGUE

3) Dialogue is what the characters say. It should sound like real life, but it is edited to be lean and focused. You should estimate how long you plan for your film to be – 5 minutes or 90 minutes – this is the limited amount of time you have to tell your story. A writer might observe a real life interaction between two people where they argue back and forth for half an hour. The scene that the writer creates based on the half hour argument will probably at most be a page or two or even just a couple of lines.

The name of the character speaking is written all in capital letters above the dialogue and is indented four inches from the left margin. The dialogue is indented three inches from the left edge of the paper and two inches from the right edge of the paper.

When the character's name above the dialogue has (O.S.) after it, it means 'Off Screen'. This indicates that the speaking character can be heard by the other characters who are shown in the shot, but the speaking character is not seen by the camera (thus Off Screen).

JERRY (O.S.)

Answer the phone!

MAMA

I'm trying to finish the birthday cake
for Eric. Why don't you answer the phone?

JERRY (O.S.)

I'm in the bathroom!

Another dialogue element seen in MY FAMILY is a [Parenthetical](#). It appears within a character's dialogue, indented 3 inches from the left, written in lower case letters and contained in parentheses. A parenthetical can be an attitude, verbal direction or action direction for the actor who is speaking. They should be short, to the point, descriptive, and only used when absolutely necessary. Longer direction should be written as Action. Example:

NIQUA

(mumbling)

Shut your big mouth.

SPACING

Single-space within dialogue and within a description paragraph. Double-space between heading lines and dialogue and description. 'FADE-IN:' opens a screenplay on the first page. When you put all the component parts of a scene together, this is how it looks:

FADE IN:

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

RING! RING! The telephone bellows underneath a disarrayed
stack of old newspapers and clutter.

JERRY (O.S.)
Answer the phone!

MAMA, a determined-looking woman in her mid-60's is at the dining table icing a cake. There are many dishes of food on the table.

MAMA
I'm trying to finish the birthday cake for Eric. Why don't you answer the phone!

JERRY (O.S.)
I'm in the bathroom!

NIQUA, a calm looking ten year old enters the room.

NIQUA
I'll get it. Where is the phone?

(cont.)

HOW A PRODUCER LOOKS AT A SCRIPT

Imagine that you have an opportunity to 'pitch' your story idea to a producer (a person who has - or knows how to raise - the money and resources to turn your script into a film). Interested, the producer asks to see your script. Before even beginning to read it, she will thumb through it, noticing and calculating:

1. Page Count: How long will the film be?
2. Scene Heading Lines:
 - What locations do you need and for how long?
 - How costly will the locations be? How far apart? (Relocation time increases budget)
 - What time of day are you shooting? Lighting needs? (Exterior night time shooting that has to be lit can be expensive)
3. How often do new characters appear? Size of cast?
4. What kinds of wardrobe, sets, and props will be needed? Easy to get or costly?
5. Script Breakdown (Estimate of how many shooting days will it take to make the film)

From these quick observations the producer can estimate the size of the budget needed to shoot your script. This is assuming, of course, that you have properly formatted your script. If you haven't, this says right off that you are an amateur and have not taken the time to educate yourself as to what is required to film a script.

[WATCH THIS VIDEO ON FORMATTING A SCRIPT](#)

For Brooklyn Young Filmmakers / Copyright Trayce Gardner (Revised 2019)

For More Information www.peopleshollywood.nyc