

Script Elements

WHAT A *SCRIPT* IS AND WHAT IT *DOES*



GEORGIAFILM
ACADEMY®

DRAMATIC WRITING FOR FILM, TELEVISION, AND THEATRE I

Script Elements

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Scene Heading

Also known as a "**Slug Line**"
Tells reader **WHERE** a **scene** takes **place**.
In other words, **WHERE** are we **standing**?
WHERE do we put the **camera**?

EX.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE, PATIO - NIGHT

INT. CONNER AEROSPACE, CONNER'S OFFICE - ESTABLISHING

INT./EXT. WALKER FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUING

SPACE MISSION 6 H.Q., 1900Z - SUNLIGHT

But... what **TO** say and what **NOT** to say?
Click **HERE** for more on scene heading.



SCENE HEADING

HOW TO WRITE THE SCENE HEADING?

SHOW don't **TELL**
DON'T direct either
LESS is **MORE**

Click **HERE** for more on "Show Don't Tell"

SCENE HEADING FORMAT

- **ALWAYS** UPPERCASE
- **Margins** typically **1.5** in lf to **1** in rt
- Starts with **INT** or **EXT** followed by a **period** – ex. **INT.** or **EXT.**
- Typically keep **headings** to **one line**
- **Two spaces** after the period is **common**
- **General description** usually **separated** from **specific description** with a **comma**.

EX:

INT. SOCIAL SCIENCE BUILDING, ROOM 1019 – EVENING



Action

Otherwise known as
“business” or “description”

It describes in the most
visual way, what happens.

Use your action paragraphs
wisely. Can SEPARATE each
action or LUMP into one.

Think About

Best way to **SELL** your script –
does the eye like **dialogue** or
action description.

Does **HOW** you write **action** vary
from **genre** to **genre**? And
format to **format**, i.e. ½ hour
sitcom vs. 1 long cable show vs. a
suspense feature film, etc. ?



ACTION FORMATTING

HOW TO WRITE THE ACTION?

SAME margins as **SCENE HEADINGS**

ONE BLANK LINE before each action
paragraph

EX.

EXT. BUILDING ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Stars shine bright as SEVEN HOSTAGES tremble on a building rooftop. A MAN WITH A GUN forces each hostage -- one by one -- closer and closer to the roof's edge.

Character Name

ALL CAPS

Typically 3.5 in from left side (or
tab over 3)

(O.S.) or **(V.O.)** is used when a
voice is **heard** but **NOT** **seen**.
This is called an **EXTENSION**.

EX.

ROB (V.O.)
Hi, it's Rob. Can you talk?

EMILY
Well actually... Hold on.



CHARACTER NAME

If you want two characters to say
the **SAME THING** at the **SAME THING**:

MARY AND DR. LEVY

No! I'll dispose of the body!

DUAL DIALOGUE looks like:

JOHN

That's not what I meant -

JAMES

But you said yesterday that -

Transitions

Indicates that we are, in some ways,
MOVING to the next **SCENE** or **SHOT**.

Some common **TRANSITIONS** are:

John crumbles to the ground, knocked-out cold.

FADE TO BLACK

We move towards a half dismantled hot rod.

CUT TO:

A destination sign on the front of the bus reads "NEW YORK CITY" and then it's gone, zooming down the highway into the sunset.

FADE OUT.



TRANSITIONS

Now that you know what they look like,
DON'T USE THEM.

Why not?

You don't **NEED** them – it's **obvious** you're **MOVING** to the **next** scene.

Don't **DIRECT** the script.

See **HERE** on why not to use transitions **AND** when to use transitions.

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Shots

Indication, within a scene, that the focus **SHIFTS** to a **specific PERSON** or **THING**.

Like **TRANSITIONS**, only use **SHOT INDICATIONS** when you **really NEED** them or else you may be “**directing**” again.

So, typically, **DON'T** use them.

SHOTS

Formatted like **SCENE HEADINGS**

Here are some sample **shots**:

Andrew sits down. WE MOVE IN CLOSER ON HIM -- as he adjusts his seat, lays his music out, gets his sticks ready...

INSERT - NEWSPAPER HEADLINE

"STRIPPER SOUGHT IN MAYOR'S MURDER" emblazoned above a cheesecake photo of Wendy Wilden.

RECEPTIONIST'S POV

Our Hero walks through the door. It swings shut behind him.

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Dialogue

Simply, **WHAT** the character **says**.

Formatting: 2.5 lf, 2.5 rt.

PARENTHETICALS...

Be **REALLY** careful if/how you use them.

Click **HERE** for more on parentheticals.

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DIALOGUE

WHAT MAKES GOOD DIALOGUE?

GOOD dialogue is about the **CHARACTERS** and what **they WANT**; **BAD** dialogue is about the **WRITER** and what he/she **wants**.

DIALOGUE should **EXPRESS** the **VOICES** of its characters and a **character's voice** comes out strongest when it's put into **CONFLICT** with something or someone that **OPPOSES** him/her.

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DIALOGUE

WHAT MAKES GOOD DIALOGUE?

PLAY

*Click PLAY to go to the YouTube video

© Blade Runner (1982)



© Annie Hall (1977)

DIALOGUE

WHAT MAKES GOOD DIALOGUE?

Dialogue **ISN'T** about mundane chit chat back and forth. A **GREAT** scene making fun of these superficial social back-and-forths can be found in Woody Allen's Oscar winner for best picture, Annie Hall.

Notice how the scene wonderfully **highlights** Annie's inconsistency -- and how she goes with whatever the flow is, something that drives Woody Allen's character nuts.

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PLAY

*Click PLAY to go to the youtube video

Assignment

Write one page of dialogue.

Focus on expressing the voice of your characters and pay close attention to proper formatting.