

<https://youtu.be/4hepINkxlkc>

I'm gonna tell you everything you need to write your first screenplay. We're gonna go over story structure, formatting software, and more. Stay tuned. The first thing you need to do if you want to write screenplays is actually read some screenplays.

I put links down below for all kinds of websites that will have the scripts for your favorite movies. Now there's one thing you need to keep in mind. Some of these are production drafts or shooting drafts and some are spec scripts. You need to make sure you're writing a spec script.

There's a separate video that I made that is telling you the difference between the two. You need to know the difference. That's gonna be in a playlist at the end of this video. Next you need some software to help you write your screenplay.

The industry standard is Final Draft. That's what all the pros use. A runner up to that would be Movie Magic. I happen to like that one because of the way it handles notes, but there are plenty of free software programs that are gonna help you write your screenplay. Like Trobee and Celtx.

Some people like Write or Doit. It has a trial so there's no excuse to have a script that is not properly formatted. Again, there's links down below for some software that you can use to format your script.

Now that's gonna help you get the margins correct but you still have to know something about the basic formatting and the first thing to know is that your screenplay needs to be in 12-point courier font.

It needs to look like it was written in a typewriter. So let's look at the title page. You're gonna have the title in all caps in the middle of the page. Now here's where you can kind of veer from the rule. That is, your entire script should be written in 12-point courier font. It's becoming in vogue now to use a different font for just the title or maybe even a graphic for just the title.

And if you have a Windows computer and you want to learn how to do that I made a video about that as well but the rest of your script is gonna be 12-point courier font. Now one thing to note here - too don't

use new courier cuz a lot of people are reading things on tablets and phones and it's too light.

So use a darker courier. So you're gonna have your title in the middle of the page. Then below that you're gonna have either written 'by' and then below that you're gonna have your name. Then on either the bottom left or the bottom right you're gonna put your name and your email address and your phone number.

It's becoming kind of not so much in vogue anymore to put your address, so you don't need to put your address there. So now let's look at the first page of your script. There's not gonna be a number on the first page the rest of the pages of the script will have numbers on them the first one does is so don't think that's an error when you're printing it out.

Then you used to have to write 'fade in' as the first thing in your script. We don't really do that anymore because it's kind of a given. If we're gonna see something, we must have faded in. So you're just gonna start with your slug line or your scene heading.

This basically tells us where the scene takes place and what time it takes place, so it's gonna start with either ext or int. That is short for either interior or exterior. Is this an inside shot or an outside shot? So if it was at the park it would be ext, exterior park.

If it was in a living room it would be interior 'int period living room'. Then at the end you're gonna put the time. Now really all you have to put here is day or night. Don't go crazy and start putting mid afternoon, early evening, 4:00 a.m., because that just flags you as an amateur.

Because you have to understand what someone's gonna do with this script. Eventually, down the road, if it sells, because your script is gonna sell, if someone has to break down this script and they need to know how to shoot this.

And if you wrote 4 a.m. the whole crew is not gonna sit around for half a day or stay up all night waiting for 4:00 a.m. to shoot your scene. If it needs to be daytime outside they're gonna shoot it whenever they can.

If it's night-time they're gonna shoot it whenever they can, so just put either day or night. That's it. Then under that you're gonna have your description or action lines and the first thing you're gonna write is something to kind of orient us to the setting.

Just a little snippet and again you don't want to go crazy here. A good rule of thumb is to write the way you would describe a movie that you saw to a friend. So let's say we have our two bad guys go to a bar and they start talking about their diamond heist.

If you were describing this movie that you saw to a friend, you wouldn't say 'okay, so they go to this bar and the bar has green barstools and there's a dartboard and there's three pool tables in the back and the bathrooms are at the very back and the bar is kind of long and there's two TVs over the bar'.

Your friend would be like 'what are you talking about? Why are you telling me about the barstool? What why do I have to know where the bathrooms are? Just tell me the story'. If you were describing this movie to a friend, you would just say 'so the bad guys go to the seedy bar' and then they start doing whatever they're gonna do.

You just want to give a vibe of the location because you're gonna let the set designer figure out the specifics. You're not gonna start telling us what's on the walls and what color things are. A screenplay is not like a novel, so you're just gonna very quickly give us the vibe of the setting.

Is it say a modern office? Is it a living room decorated? You know, something really quick that just gives us the vibe of where we are. And this is where I'm gonna go on my squirrel rant because I think is so often a good way to show that you're new and you don't know what you're doing is to start asking for very specific things that are unnecessary.

And my favorite one is they'll say its 'exterior, park, day' and they'll say 'it's a beautiful day at the park and a squirrel runs across the ground'. Does the squirrel factor into the story? Is this the movie about squirrels? Does the squirrel come and bite somebody and they get rabies and it starts a zombie apocalypse?

No, the squirrel is just stuck in for decoration. It is pointless. It is meaningless and the person putting a squirrel in there for no darn good reason doesn't know what they're asking for, because you're gonna have to ask the production to hire a Flora, a trained squirrel.

And you're probably gonna have to have a squirrel Wrangler with the squirrel. You might have to have a baby girl, you might have to pay PETA to come babysit the situation to make sure no squirrels were harmed in this production. Then you have to house the squirrel and the squirrel Wrangler and also transport them from wherever they're being housed to the scene.

You're asking for all this money and all this effort and all this time and it doesn't matter so do not put anything in your screenplay that doesn't actually matter. No pretty set decoration, no Faberge eggs just sitting on the shelf, just to be pretty. You want to give very general ideas of things they can use. Whatever is available and give us some vibe without unnecessary skills.

Then you're gonna introduce your characters. Now every time you introduce a new character you're gonna put their name in all caps. What that does is, the person breaking down the script later, after your script sells and somebody has to break it down to shoot it, it tells them this is the first time we've seen this character.

So they can then keep track of them during the script. So the first time they appear their names gonna be in all caps. Then you're gonna give us either an age range, like 40s or you might give a specific age if they're younger like 16 - 17.

Then again, a brief description without getting too specific. You're not gonna tell us everything they're wearing from head to toe. You're not gonna tell us that they have blue eyes and brown hair. That's for the casting agent... you're gonna give us more of a vibe like they're goth or their nerdy or their preppy.

Read screenplays and you'll kind of get more of a gist for it, so that you'll understand how to introduce characters. So what else is going to go in your action lines and your description lines is exactly that; action or description.

So you know Ted walks across the room, someone goes and picks something up. Anything you see on screen is going to go in the action and description lines and a general rule of thumb is that every time you start a new paragraph you are implying a different camera shot.

So if you want everything to kind of have same shot, you can put it on the same paragraph. If you're kind

of cutting back and forth between two different shots, then you're gonna start new paragraphs. You also don't usually want to have paragraphs that are any longer than four to five lines because when you get a big block of text the person reading is just gonna curl up in the fetal position and cry because they don't want to dive into that.

You want to make it easy to read. They say in Hollywood you want a lot of white space. When you look at your page you want to see a lot of white space. If you are still a little unclear about what goes in the action lines I made a video called the Pace of the Read, which is a very different way of looking at it which will help you mucho mucho.

So go watch that, it'll be in the playlist at the end. Now after action lines comes the dialogue. You're gonna have your character's name and all caps in the middle, then below that is going to be what they say.

Now you sometimes have an extension after the character's name. That would be either vo or os or OC vo is voice over. That's when you have something that was recorded somewhere else this coming on top of the scene. OS or OC is off screen or off camera.

That would be if the camera is looking somewhere else but the other actor is still in the vicinity so we can hear them. We just can't see them. Underneath the character's name you might have Wiley's or parentheses. That would be an action that is happening while the character says something.

So let's say Tom asked bill to pass the salt and so Bill passes the salt, as he says 'sure. here you go'. You would put that in a Wiley under the character name 'passing the salt he says here you go now'. If he doesn't say anything and he just passes a salt, then it would just being the action line 'bill passes the salt'.

What can also go in the the parentheses is some kind of a modifier of how they say something. So if you want to put 'smiling' or 'sarcastic' or something like that, but you really, really want to limit the use of these.

Actors find them annoying, cuz you're telling them what to do like you know better and it just kind of clutters up the read and usually they're redundant. Someone will write 'sarcastic' and it's a line that's very obviously sarcastic, or someone will say 'screaming' and then it'll be all caps with exclamation points, where it was kind of obvious.

To help you with dialogue I made this video. Again, this will be in the big old playlist of videos at the end that you're gonna watch after this video. That will help you avoid some really common dialogue mistakes.

Now a general rule of thumb is that each of your scenes should be around two pages long, so some will be shorter. You might have some scenes that are half a page, one page. Some will be three pages, four pages.

Maybe sometimes you have a really long scene but if all your scenes are like three pages, four pages, five pages, seven pages, they're too long. You got to start cutting that and start speeding up the pace. Now how long should your screenplay be?

The old numbers about 10 years ago where that your screenplay should be like 95 to 120 pages. That's come way down now. The longest your screenplay should probably be aim for like 105 pages, so you can be like 90 to 105.

Now after you're finished your screenplay how are you going to get it to Hollywood? Most of the times submissions are made through email with a PDF, so in your screenplay software you're gonna generate a PDF and you're gonna send that and the very first page of the PDF will be the title page.

Now let's say you actually need to bind your screenplay because a friend of yours is having a pool party and Steven Spielberg's coming and he said he would read a script on the way home in the plane. Are you gonna go to Kinko's and get the most expensive awesome binding they have so you'll impress Steven Spielberg?

No, because the industry binds the screenplays in a very particular way. You're gonna get two blank pieces of cardstock. White is great. Another neutral color is fine. One on the front, one in the back. The whole thing is three-hole punched but you're only gonna put one and a quarter of brass fasteners in the top and the bottom and then so that those stay in nice and cozy.

You're gonna use some brass washers, there's links for those down below. Now we're gonna talk about story structure. You'll hear a lot about three-act structure. As you start kind of with the ordinary world

set up, then around page 12-15 you have what's called the 'inciting incident' that kind of sets the story in motion.

Then you've got like a climax, plot point kind of at the end of Act one. You've got something exciting and amazing happening in the midpoint. Something else unbelievably exciting and amazing is happening at the end of Act two and then you've got your climax at the end and then a resolution after the climax.

Now if that's too mathematical for you and that makes really no sense, I hear you, and a more simple way to think about it comes from Emma Coates, who wrote a list called the 'Twenty two rules of storytelling'.

Now some books that you can read that pretty much all screenwriters have read, whether they actually use them or not they're still aware of them. Syd field, Screenplay Story by Robert McKee, Save the Cat by Blake Schneider.

Now there are a lot of different ways to go about structuring your story and I have my own particular way that I made a video about it and this could have been a book because it's a revolutionary way to plot your story.

Starting from the middle, then going from the middle to the end, then going backwards and it solves one of the biggest problems that I see in the scripts that I read and that is repetitive boring screenplays.

Because usually, when you read structure books or you look at structure templates, you have a character has a goal and they're fighting towards their goal and they have setbacks and they keep fighting towards their goal and have setbacks. And you end up with this really repetitive story and you don't have much of a character arc as well.

I'll talk about character arcs in a second here. So after you watch this video and you watch the playlist of all the videos I'm mentioning, you're gonna watch this video which is Your screenplay needs Candy. It's about candy steppin'. It's about a series of progressive related goals and it works for both character driven or plot driven scripts.

You can look at Silver Linings playbook or you can look at Die Hard or Silence of the Lambs and it's still gonna match this template and if you use my technique it's gonna give you a much more exciting script and it's gonna really help you understand what should be there.

It's gonna make you avoid the horrible horrible repetitive screenplays that are so rampant. Now let's talk about character arc. Usually somebody has to have one. They'll talk usually about it being your main character having one, but it doesn't always have to be your main character.

It has to be some character and I talked about this in this video Advanced Screenwriting. You can watch that as well. So your arc is gonna be you forcing a character to change and grow though and do what they need to do.

So all these external things that you're forcing your character to do and suffer are to push them to change and grow. So you also want to very much keep in mind your characters arc or the character arc that is in there, if it's not your main character, when you are plotting your screenplay.

I have a video on that as well. It is called Structure with Character Arc. Now after you are finished with your screenplay, if you wanna, you can copyright it. If you're a little paranoid that somebody's gonna steal it you can register with the Library of Congress or the WGA to help protect your copyright.

Now you have copyright whether you officially registered or not but if it makes y'all cozy to not have to worry that somebody's gonna steal your movie, I put links down below for the websites you need to go to if you want to register your script for copyright.

Now after you finish your script you're gonna need some feedback. You need to refine it and make it better. Now your mom is great but she's probably not gonna give very constructive criticism because she's gonna be too nice and give you cookies.

You want people that are a little more inside the industry. A nice first step would be Zoetrope <https://www.zoetrope.com/>, which is the website that Francis Ford Coppola made and it's basically peer review. It's other screenwriters, newer screenwriters like you and you're doing review swaps.

You read their script and they'll read yours. Now the best way to learn screenwriting is to evaluate and read other people's screenplays, because you will see the mistakes they make and they will annoy you so much you will never make those mistakes again.

Zoetrope is a great site to go to for feedback but then eventually you're going to want feedback from people who are in the industry who are reading the scripts that are currently out there. There are a lot of different places you can go to.

One of the ones I happen to use is Screenplay Readers. I also use the Screenplay Mechanic and Amanda's Script Gal, so there's links for those down below. I am very, very, very rarely available for notes and I'll have a link for me down below but the waiting list and I have no idea when I'll be available.

Then after you've gotten all kinds of feedback and everyone cries tears of joy when they read your script, and it's everything you want it to be, and it's ready to go, then you're gonna want to watch my video [How to sell a Screenplay](#).

It's gonna talk about contests and pitchfest and all kinds of avenues into Hollywood. There's all kinds of ways to break in. And that is everything you need to know to write your amazing screenplay and I encourage you to do it, even if you've never written anything.

Even if you don't consider yourself a writer. You will just become a more interesting, fascinating, happy person if you embark on this journey and especially if you have a story that is burning inside of you that wants to come out, so write that screenplay!

The playlist for all the videos I mentioned is going to be at the end and also a link for my sketch comedy channel, where I work out my sillies called [Bad Squish](#). You can check that out as well. I hope you appreciated this video. If you did, don't forget to give it a thumbs up and don't forget to subscribe and I will talk to you later.