

Bare-Bones Film Format

For
This Crew of Writers
2022-23

Notes On Film Format:

Here's a quick introduction to *Bare-Bones format for film*. It's designed for single-camera format.

In our workshop, we also use the single camera format for sit-coms.

I'll give a list of links for useful Format-processers but do notice that a film script looks a certain way upon the page.

DO read this full document as it covers the format on the page.

FILM FORMAT: BARE-BONES

If you have dedicated software, most of the settings will be in place for you.

If you're using a regular word processor such as 'Word' templates are out there at no cost, to little cost that will almost accomplish the look of the same thing.

However, I recommend using a dedicated Script-writing word processor. It frees you to do essential work in the writing itself.

Look through the "Film Links" at the end of these pages for a list of useful links.

As a reminder, we are writing for a *screen*. We don't need to call for elaborate & precise Camera movements. We are all part of a team that makes film-video-stage-plays-books... and we live, no matter where we are, in a small village of creators.

FORMAT:

Let's begin with the font itself - no fancy fonts; avoid Gothic, avoid any florid form - it's always best to stick with the same font chosen by almost all Screenplay Software setting - Courier New, 12 pt.

The reason behind this is that almost all 'readers' of scripts are highly suspicious of fancy looking scripts. When scripts are bound with special covers, have a cover picture, and binding - there's instant suspicion that the content is weak.

Keep it simple; keep it plain - rely on your words to create the image and the content.

Do NOT use ALL-CAPS or italics or bold for dialogue emphasis. Unless, of course, no performer could guess the delivery in under a year. And if that's the case, it's time to tune the dialogue anyway.

Now the format notes:

The first 'element' (or format command) you're likely to use when you begin your screenplay or teleplay is the centered Title.

First, I'll show a page of script, and then I'll go through the Format we used, and at the end of this document, you'll find a bunch of links about format & other things. All single-camera film format is single-spaced.

SAMPLE SHORT FILM:

Visitation Rights

Sample Script

FADE IN:

EXT. GARDEN -- DAY

A magical, mystical looking garden that rolls towards the ocean. Mist is moving towards the shore while a distant FOGHORN echoes. We see a small ROW-BOAT coming towards the lawn. There's a HUMMING NOISE from above our shot, and the air begins to shimmer.

EXT. SHORELINE -- CONTINUOUS

A yellow row-boat; the oar dips into frame and we travel up the oar and along strong hands to reveal: GORDON CASE, craggy, in his forties, anxious, checking his wrist watch long enough to break his rhythmic stroke.

EXT. GARDEN -- CONTINUOUS

In the center of the garden we see LISA CASE, a young girl in a very old fashioned pinafore & apron. Despite all the modern touches that we'll see around us, she's oddly dressed in an 'Alice-In-Wonderland' type of outfit.

She stands in the middle of the garden where the air shimmered. There's no logical way she could have gotten to her position so quickly. She spies the rowboat and begins to run home.

LISA
 He's coming. He's coming! Daddy's
 here!

EXT. SHORELINE - CONTINUOUS

Leaping from his boat, wading in his shoes through the water, it's clear that Gordon is anxious that he won't be late.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Again, odd details in the kitchen as if someone got the props mixed up. There's an old-fashioned WOOD-STOVE, but next to it is a futuristic MICRO-WAVE. There's a Black-Forest type of CLOCK, but above the cuckoo hatch is a DIGITAL CLOCK. KEROSENE LAMPS and HALOGEN LIGHTS are scattered around the room.

Lisa pays no attention to any of this oddness. This is, after all, her home and she loves it.

There's a jug of LEMONADE on the large table, and around it are her favorite STUFFED ANIMALS, jammed against the table.

YOUR SCRIPT:

Now, here's the explanation of what lies behind the approach to the formatting that lies behind the excerpt from our sample script..

YOUR SCRIPT TITLE

BY YOUR NAME

This will be followed by, as an example, the first thing you do - which is to type the command:

FADE IN:

...followed immediately by the "Slugline" or "Scene Heading" That's the line which lets the reader know where you are.

A reminder that a scene, in film, is a continuous unit of time and of space. If you jump time, either to the past or to the future, that means we have a new scene.

If you change location, that also means a new scene.

Any time you have a new scene - you will need a new SLUGLINE - (sometimes called a SCENE HEADING) and here's the bare-bones of the contents of a SLUGLINE: First, in the slugline, we need to know if the scene takes place inside or outside...

INT. Interior if you're inside;

EXT. Exterior if you're outside;

In the Slug Line (or Scene Heading) you'll also include the specific location...

...and if it's day or night.

I'm typing this is our Apartment LIVING ROOM, in the day, so the slugline will read:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

If I were LOCATED on the balcony, in the NIGHT it would read:

EXT. BALCONY - NIGHT

The slug line is always capitalized, as is the 'Fade In' instruction.

Keep it brief. If the Slugline nears the right hand margin of the page it's too wordy.

Another tip - almost always, when you feel like adding a Parenthetical Expression to describe the emotion of a character, it won't be needed.

We usually know the emotion by what's in the dialogue, and the situation of the character. So we almost never need such descriptions as...

...(sadly) or (Laughing) or (warmly) or (coldly) or (rolls eyes) or (smirks) or (mutters) or (blushes) or (groans) ... the list of words to avoid is a very large one!

The time we need a description of response it is where it isn't clear from dialogue or action exactly what's being felt.

If, as an example, a character, RUSTY, hears that his father has died, and replies unexpectedly...to his dad's gruesome death.... here's how that could look....

RUSTY
 (laughing)
 He's dead?
 (guffaws)
 Truly dead!???

End of Sample.

FORMAT VARIATIONS:

When you've finished your script, go through it looking for places where you've described an emotion you don't need to describe and remove the parenthetical expression; or if it isn't clear - insert one.

There are many variations of format. Each writer evolves (within limits) her or his approach to style. So don't be alarmed if scripts vary.

Read as many scripts as you can. Be warned that many places on the internet have scripts which are not actual production scripts of TV shows and Feature Films. That's because printed versions of scripts aren't actually the *production* scripts. Frequently they're transcriptions off the screen. The versions were not provided by the writers of the Screenplay. Such scripts frequently contain useless format. If something you read in an on-line script seems wildly different from what you see within our format examples, check it out elsewhere.

Next: the different terms used for different elements:

SCENE HEADING/SLUGLINE:

This gives you the SLUGLINE setting.

ACTION:

Usually, right after the Slugline, we describe where we are. The *Action* setting is the one for that & usually a paragraph return takes you there.

Use a brief and vivid description to 'set' the scene in the reader's mind. Let's see and hear the location. Brief and vivid is the ticket.

CHARACTER:

This one is obvious. But, a reminder that you DON'T need both FIRST and LAST names in the 'Character' position. That's used when a Character first appears in the script. At that time, we give FIRST & LAST names, (approximate Age) and a very quick and memorable description.

We don't need a prose style lengthy description.

Do avoid (with the naming of extras) using too many generic names in a row - such as COP # 1, COP # 2, COP # 22, etc.

Give a few specific names, or names that vary. Otherwise the read slows to a standstill as the reader tries to figure what the hell is going on.

DIALOGUE:

Clicking this will put you into the dialogue format. So will hitting the return key after writing the Character Name.

(PARENTHETICAL):

Will place something extra between the CHARACTER name and the dialogue she speaks.

Usually best to avoid. Too many brackets of performance directions will say, right away, that you don't trust the script-reader to figure this out. Plus it slows the read - a lot.

TRANSITION:

- the familiar "CUT TO:" or "DISSOLVE TO: we cover this in the document already.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

I always suggest that writers read aloud the pages generated in each day's writing. Read dialogue and all descriptions aloud. You'll hear the difference right away. The reader may see the difference when she's reading the script of a writer who knows about the necessity of ongoing revisions.

By pre-production time, you'll have a good sense of where your script is going. As a regular part of the work pattern in script-writing, it's vital to keep the forward motion; to arrive at the point where you hope to bring your script.

In addition, a regular part of the script-writing process is, as well, to be doing tidy-up work with the previous pages. One of the first things that begins in the initial production process is a continuing checking of the script.

Many times, in all production worlds, we'll need to suddenly change pages & shift things around depending on the production schedule. Get used to this process in advance...it will give us all a much longer writing career.

When we're flexible, but also not afraid to neutrally defend our position, all goes well. However, when there's a point-of-view that always defends, when there are pages that never seem to change no matter what the notes, the writer is in a precarious position. All things change in some way, like life, as we approach actual production.

APPROACHES:

When a new writer nears the production process, there are a few approaches that are a given:

The script pages you submit, as a draft, to a production house, must actually be script pages and not a disguised treatment; the characters need to have names when required, and Extras are named in such a way that it remains easy to see and hear the action without a need to look back to a previous page to see if we know who the hell the attackers are, or see the representative of the COPS, or FIRE-FIGHTERS, or ELVES, ALIENS, or PARAMEDICS...

When you look at EXTRAS look for one or two, at least, that you can name or describe in such a way that we'll 'see' them in mind at once

..And, when we've received all our Rough Draft, or First Draft notes - the studio/Story Consultant will expect to see a reflection of their notes appearing in the next submission.

This is a form where flexibility is a vital key to being able to enter the business/art/craft, and to remain active in it.

There are a few red-flags for show-runners, and one of them is to notice when pages seldom get a touch-up, as well as when lines aren't being adjusted; where many names are abstract, (COP #1, COP # 76, COP # 22 & where settings are rarely described.

We adjust our formatting approaches depending on the Network, Production House, and the Story-Consultant who will work with us.

If you do a script for one Network, you may be asked to follow the approaches of *Warner's Script* formatting. However, the next studio may have their own approach.

The writer adjusts to that specific. If we talk with our peers who keep the Indy lights going, each will have an even more vital reason to have formatting reflect production practices.

If the formatting practices of the production-house aren't followed, and do NOT get reflected, it's as big a deal as missing a deadline. And getting the script in at the specified time needed, is a very big expectation on the part of producers.

The closer we get to actual production, the more impact on the approaching shoot & what we need to do in response to Production notes.

Here's a few quick examples:

We want to make sure that our KEY PROPS get ALL-CAPS. If it's a GATLING-GUN being assembled in a kitchen, we make sure someone remembers to have the weapon on set. If it's fired, it needs to be able to be fired and so on, we know how much attention MUST be paid to this kind of potentially dangerous process.

There's a very specific reason for ALL-CAPS when we need them.. The ALL-CAPS make the production-attention go to the description on the page. That's why I discourage in any project I work on, the practice of DOING ALL-CAPS every time a lead character appears in all-caps EVERY TIME THE NAME IS USED. I always suggest not doing that. It ruins the natural production process and seems to always end up in Dialogue typos as well when a S & R goes wrong.

Standard and expected props do not need such an ALL-CAPS treatment.

If someone is at a kitchen table and has in front of them cutlery, plates, a tablecloth...you don't need to ALL-CAP those props.

If you have a PET PIG wandering around the GATLING GUN, there'd be ALL-CAPS where I just indicated. If we have Extras arrive on set, we ALL-CAP the EXTRAS the *first time* they appear in a new scene.

If we have a group, or a crowd, or a riot, we take the time to describe the setting, and give images of the kind of crowd, the sort of people who will be present in the scene.

We ALL-CAP a character the first time they appear in a script, and give a quick description which conveys what we know about them & delivers a sense of the scene to the imagination

That's enough to get started! Have fun. Check out the links. It's most useful to check out your own sources through any search-engine. But here's a group to get you started.

FILM LINKS

WriterDuet:

- Free - and there's also a 'prop' version - but they have a Free Version that will do what you need.. check out this link..

<https://writerduet.com>

Celtx:

Here's the Free Cloud-Based Celtx...
<https://www.celtx.com/index.html>

You may write, post, add comments and save the file as a PDF. It also works on the phone, for Mac, for PC based, and may be tweaked to run on open-source operating systems such as Ubuntu.

<https://www.celtx.com/index.html>

Already have free Celtx? Here's a link to their phone app
<https://www.celtx.com/mobile.html>

Open Office:

Here's a totally free way to build quickly & easily a working Scriptwriting piece of software. All the work's done for us.

Here's the link to get your own FREE copy of Open Office:
<https://www.openoffice.org/>

And here's a link to obtain the free template that will allow you to write screenplays in Open Office:

<http://extensions.openoffice.org/en/project/screenwright-screenplay-formatting-template>

This next link contains links to various screenplays so you can read the scripts of Favorite movies.

<http://www.moviescriptsandscreenplays.com>

Here's a site with many, many scripts:

<Http://www.script-o-rama.com/>

Format Information:

Our own Main Site is 24-7 Always Free....

<https://theformatpage.yolasite.com>

We keep notes there on Radio Drama, Sonic Theatre, Stage-play Formatting, and Film and Video Notes.

Our Other Sites:

A Reminder of **Dramatic Elements** - which looks at formatting elements and relates them to drama in all our formats. This site is in early development - we'll be adding a bunch of new links as on-going Construction is the norm in my world.

We'll be adding more for each area, but right now we begin, or continue, a life-long connection to inter-connecting all forms - A Magister Ludi connection without the medieval construct.

<http://dramatic-elements.yolasite.com/>

Writers Direct

Our Hyphnate Site Where Writers become Directors &...we reflect the very beginnings of this business/art-form - and in those days we did it all.

We learned and improvised together - and the group evolved into understanding the way a central document could form - and give direction to all. That document is the script.

<http://writersdirect.ca/>

And here's a multi-purpose site...getting ready to hold future productions as well.

Terra Nova Pix

<https://www.terranozapix.com>

More to come - but this is a beginning document where all may see some of the extra corners of the virtual office!

Write on & on & on!